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EVELYN MARTIN'S

"RELUCTANT EVE"

November, 1956

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Front cover and interior photos by H. Eugene Miller

Illustrations by
Virgil Finlay, Charles Hornstein, H. W. McCauley

OTHER WORLDS SCIENCE STORIES

NOVEMBER 1956

ISSUE NO. 19 (40)

Published Every Other Month By

PALMER PUBLICATIONS, INC.
806 DEMPSTER STREET
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Evanston, Illinois. Additional entry at Sandusky, Ohio. Editorial offices: Other Worlds, Amherst, Wisconsin. Subscriptions: 12 issues $3.00; 24 issues $6.00. No unsolicited manuscripts will be returned unless accompanied by return envelope and sufficient postage; nor is any responsibility accepted for such manuscripts, photographs or art work. No specific rate of payment is offered, being by arrangement only. Any similarity of characters in stories or articles to persons living or dead is purely coincidental. Printed in U.S.A. by Stephens Printing Corporation, Sandusky, Ohio.

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....Editorial...

THIS month marks a milestone in the history of OTHER WORLDS. First, it is our Seventh Anniversary. OTHER WORLDS began its career with the November, 1949 issue, and although, like many magazines during these hectic years, it has had its ups-and-downs, it has survived to become one of the best-liked magazines read today. It is certainly not the biggest, nor the oldest, but with the stories it is publishing, it cannot be said to be second to any in this respect. We say this like Little Sir Echo, because we merely parrot the words of our readers whose letters firmly declare that for sheer excellence of story material, they will take no other magazine.

This is a gratifying result, to be sure. As a token of our appreciation for the approving wave of the hand of Dame Fortune we are inaugurating in this issue the first of what we intend to be an annual series of awards of merit for the best science fiction of the year. Thus, as you may have noted, this issue presents a marked difference in appearance over its predecessors in that its cover is not a painting of a bug-eyed monster, or of a space ship, nor yet a winged woman of Saturn—but a photo of a very attractive woman, the author of the wonderful novel presented in this issue in condensed form.

We want to tell you all about this, of course, but we'll do it in a big way in the following three pages, complete with photos (including many interspersed with the story itself). In the editorial we'll only say that of all the stories received by our editorial staff during 1956, Evelyn Martin's "Reluctant Eve" we consider the best effort by a new author (and in fact, the best initial effort we've seen in years.) This isn't Evelyn's first story, because we published her novelet, "Narkeeta," in our July 1955 issue, and were very pleased to have it receive high praise.

We aren't publishing the complete novel, but a condensation, however we predict that you'll find it a wonderful experience, and a heart-warming one. Evelyn Martin writes with her heart, and with feeling. She will go far!

There are several other reasons why this is a milestone issue of OTHER WORLDS. The return of Don Wilcox, who was discovered by your editor back in 1938, and who became one of the top writers of all time in the science fiction field. His "The Fires of Kessa" is something you'll agree is Don Wilcox *par excellence!*

Then we have our latest discovery—and what a discovery! We had intended to introduce him with his terrific novelet, Tri-Infinity, but in making up this issue, we received a short story he just had to get out of his system. We thought it would be a good hint of what is to come, so we present it here, without fanfare—and only suggest that you read it as a warm-up for the novelet (which precedes a tremendous 200,000 word novel called "The Last Summer of Loran," which will be the finest novel, and the longest, you've read in these, or many other, pages!)

Finally, we have another of those rare and hard-to-get humor stories—this one by Hal Annas, whose Novakkan stories created such a sensation in our Nov-Feb-April issues just passed. We think you'll like "My Head Is Ticking" as much as you liked "A Witch In Time" by Locke, in our last issue.

Warning! Next issue (Jan) "The Metamorphs" by S. J. Byrne. You'll LIKE it! *Rap*

JULES VERNE PRIZE FOR '56

The editors of OTHER WORLDS are proud to announce the winner of its first annual science fiction award in honor of Jules Verne, the father of science fiction. The award certificate this year, given for the most outstanding achievement in the science fiction field for 1956, is for an original novel, and is presented to

EVELYN MARTIN

For a meritorious accomplishment in her first novel

"RELUCTANT EVE"

EACH YEAR the editors of OTHER WORLDS, in recognition of the need to stimulate the creative efforts of writers in the science fiction field, have conceived of our "Jules Verne Annual Award For meritorious Science Fiction," to be bestowed in any category in which a literary effort of special merit is produced. The award this year goes to a first novel, and even more amazingly, to a writer whose talents have only once before been placed before the public.

Evelyn Martin, whose first novel is published in this issue in condensed form, is the author of a novelet published in the July, 1955 issue of OTHER WORLDS, her first appearance in print. Her home is Prichard, Alabama, and she is a member of the staff of radio station WAIP.

She was born thirty-two years ago in Faunsdale, Alabama, and moved to Thomasville at the age of fourteen. Even in high school her literary talents cropped out, and she authored a column for the Thomasville *Times*, which drew some criticism from her principal for too many "out of this world" items. She graduated in June, 1940, and married Joe "Scoop" Martin, *Times* reporter, in July. When her husband went into the Air Corps, she followed him all over the country, until he went to Italy, leaving her to "sweat out" thirty-five missions over Germany. She passed the time in a munitions factory making shells. Upon his return, a baby girl was born, Katheryn Michel Martin (Kittymike), to be followed two years later by Robert "Robin" and two more years by Eleanor "Ellen". Among other jobs, she worked as an IBM keypunch operator; as an Atlantic Coast Line Railway Company employee, and later, at the Gulf, Mobile and Ohio Railroad offices. During lunch hours, at these various jobs, she spent her time writing, and it was then that she created the character "Peggy" in her novel-to-be.

In March of 1955, she determined to express her personality with more vigor, and joined the staff of radio station WAIP, where she worked with famous singer and producer Jack Cardwell, who is a popular Decca recording artist, one of the most popular "hill-billy" singers in the Gulf Coast area. She gives Jack credit for much of her inspiration, and it was his prodding that inspired her to put her stories on paper and submit them to a publisher. Her immediate success is his greatest pride and joy. Jack's a science fiction fan himself and he recognized her talent.

Among her friends she marks such

Mayor G. V. Dismukes, on the steps of the Prichard City Hall, congratulates Evelyn Martin on winning OTHER WORLDS' first annual Jules Verne Award for the most meritorious and original achievement in the science fiction literary field.

prominent people as Mayor G. V. Dismukes of Prichard, Congressman Frank Boykin, and Senator John Sparkman, all of whom display a great interest in her remarkable talent for realism and heart-interest in her stories. Evelyn believes firmly in life on other planets, the unity of man, and the futility of war.

Her current achievement is the selection as "Citizen of the Week" by the Mobile *Press-Register*. All in all, Evelyn is the darling of Prichard and Mobile, and the sweetheart of all Alabama.

In winning this first OTHER WORLDS Jules Verne Merit Award, Evelyn Martin has set a precedent that will be difficult to equal, much less surpass. One of the prime requisites for good science fiction is *realism*, and she has attained it in this novel. Her characters seem to live and breathe, and no matter how fantastic the experiences they go through, at no time do they seem unbelievable. This is an accomplishment all too infrequently attained by science fiction writers. Imagination is a wonderful thing, but even imagination must have a solid springboard, and it is largely in the true-life realism of the characters that it is given an air of conviction and credibility.

The ability of the reader to associate himself with the character is a vital necessity to maintain an air of authenticity, and to bring real emotions to the surface. Reading can be a dull thing without this emotional identification, but in Evelyn Martin's stories, this is an inevitable result. Hers is a woman's touch, true, and a sentimental one. Yet, it is not merely a romantic aura that permeates her writing, but an air of forthrightness and honesty of thought. Truly, if all mankind possessed the characteristics of the people in her stories, war and hatred could not exist.

Her talents are recognized by her associates, and especially does WAIP boss man Herbert Johnson draw upon them in making his plans. Mayor Dismukes, whose own talents are a byword in Prichard, is enthusiastic in consulting with her, even on such matters as Prichard's future growth. Evelyn has many friends, among them Jeff Daniels, WAIP singer, whose creative talents are also considerable, as his latest Melody Records hit tune, "Hey, Woman" ably demonstrates.

Perhaps the most delightful half-hour in Prichard is when Evelyn and the "gang" gather at Dick Russell's Drive-In for the coffee break. Here you will always find Evelyn the center of a lively discussion on one subject or another, and most likely it will be on science fiction, over which heated arguments ensue. There will be announcer Vivian Donald, whose beauty is matched only by her voice; salesman Chuck Blumenthal and Jimmy Whatley; chief engineer Gene Miller; Cardwell, Daniels and not least by any means, chef James Price and owner Dick Russell. Here's where southern hospitality really shows its true flavor, and it may well be that this is where Evelyn gets that wonderful friendliness that is expressed so vividly in her stories. As Hy Davis, one of the nation's leading disc jockeys says: Evelyn is for real!

Which just about sums up why the Editors of OTHER WORLDS found "Reluctant Eve" such a fascinating story, and they believe you will too! You'll grow to love her in the future, because she'll write many a story for you!

Just wait and see!

Reluctant Eve

By Evelyn Martin

Evelyn Martin discusses an advertising pomotion with WAIP's Herbert Johnson, one of her "favorite people", and for whom she writes reams of advertising copy as further proof of her literary ability.

What if you were actually asked to become the mother of a new race; to go to the rescue of another planet where all women had died and there were only men, doomed to extinction?

PROLOGUE

INSIGNIFICANT in the immensity of the Milky Way there floats a bright and shining star. It has been burning for milleniums, and many more milleniums shall pass away before its flaming gases burn themselves into extinction. Around this Mother Sun circle nine small worlds; children to whom she gave birth in some ancient galactic up-

heaval. These children are fantastically different, ranging as they do from almost molten Mercury to the frozen wastes of distant Pluto. They are individuals in their own right, with the exception of the fraternal twins - - Venus and Earth.

These beloved children the mother has held close to her enveloping bosom, bathing them in her everlasting warmth and granting to them the glorious gift of life. Upon more distant Earth she could lavish her affection without fear of harm; but to Venus she gave a protective coating of milky clouds to protect the embryonic life beneath from her most burning rays.

Thus it was that when the first creatures of Earth crept from the slime in the dawn of creation, they reached for the sun. They learned to stand erect, and climb the trees; and so started their journey through history with no more impetus than her shining face and the added incident of a prehensile thumb.

In the heavens above them they could see peerless Venus, a lovely jewel in the necklace of the night. Her protective mantle of billowing clouds reflected the sun's light to form the radiance of the Evening Star, long a source of mystery and folk-lore; hidden from the eyes of Earthmen by her silvery mantle of white.

Beneath that mantle that protected her beauty from raging heat, the first unicellar life forms began to stir in the cooling seas. The centuries passed, and the life forms changed and grew and developed. As the crust of new upheavals settled, these forms sought expansion, struggled painfully onto the cracking soil. Time after time they were forced back into the sea, and time after time they struggled forth again. It became their refuge, their haven in times of stress. When they knew fear, knew birth or death, they always returned to her warm embrace.

* * *

THANE, Royal Prince of the Planet Venus, lay resting on the green sand at the bottom of the clear lake that surrounded his palace. He chewed thoughtfully on a bit of water-shrub, his gills idly moving. This would be his last opportunity to relax for many revolutions. Tomorrow he must begin his journey into the unknown, but today belonged to him. He needed time to think, and to remember, and to prepare.

Thane had no fear for himself. He had been created and nurtured for one purpose - - to save Venus. He was the fourth Thane to rule Venus since the darkest day in Venusian history - - the day the last woman had died. Now his planet was gasping, drawing its last breath. He was the only hope.

It had been in the 137th Century of Recorded History that the black and deadly plague had come sweeping out of the misty swamps to the south. The men were not affected, but they lived only to see their women writhing and dying under the terrible affliction that came from nowhere to ravish their land. Men prayed, they wept. And still the deadly toll was rising. They faced extermination of their kind.

In desperation, the scientists secured from the last surviving women their fertile ovaries, put them in suspended animation for the time when they would be no more. A few added centuries of life might mean the difference between survival or annihilation. The men who discovered the method of developing the eggs into embryos and then into living organisms were given the title of Procurors of Life, and a prestige and popularity equalled only by their Prince.

Then came the awful day when the last woman died. Venusians looked at each other in fear and terror. They laid their heads upon their empty arms, and waited quietly for the surcease of death. Still, the will for survival is strong. The time came when they lifted their heads again, and went to work to save their spe-

cies from extinction. By rationing their births, man could survive even this. Blow followed blow, when they found the Procurors could produce only healthy male embryos. Experiments resulted in things only faintly female. and were spoken of in whispers. The only hope was that, somewhere above the heavy clouds of carbon dioxide and formaldehyde that hid the universe from their searching eyes, there might be other worlds, other creatures who had learned to walk erect and look upward to the stars.

They struggled long to pierce the veil, these creatures who had never seen the sun. At last a man-made moon floated above moonless Venus, and the vista of the heavens was opened unto them. From the beginning it was obvious that their only hope lay on the green planet so near to them, so much a sister world. Still they must take care. Life was too precious on Venus to risk on a pilgrimage foredoomed to disaster. The precious atmosphere surrounding the green planet would be a death trap to a giant interplanetary ship. It must have a satellite base like their own to use as a shuttle. The Venusians decided to wait a little longer, spend a few more years of futile watching, to see if the creatures there (if there were any) would themselves reach out for the stars

Now, in the reign of Thane IV, the glorious news went forth to the corners of the waiting world - - the green planet had sent up its own satellite!

Tomorrow, the young prince would blast away from his homeland, perhaps forever. From boyhood he had been groomed for this mission, and every member of his Personal Guard was a potential spaceman. Venus would send the best she had on the perilous chance, with the hopes of a dying world behind them.

The flash of a lean-limbed body in the water above him brought the prince out of his reverie. That would be Mina, Captain of the Guard, searching for him. Thane shot swiftly toward the surface, closing his gills. It must be time for prayer He would lead his men in supplication, both fresh-cheeked boys and old men hoary with age. All would listen, hearts hope-filled, as he asked the Gods for the laughter of girl children in the streets once more. Then he would rise from his knees, and go forth to his star ship to seek the one fountain from which life springs eternal - - woman.

* * *

IN any other circumstances, Peggy's job would have been commonplace. All over the world, every day, smartly dressed young women went to their positions in card punch installations. They worked in shipyards, in offices, in factories. Not Peggy. She worked on the giant satellite that man had placed in the heavens, high above his world, that circled the planet unceasingly with a revolution every two hours. Somebody had to punch the holes in the mountain of cards, with their myriad variation of data, that were fed into the hungry maw of the giant computer. It was not a job for a man. They lacked the patience, the necessary precision.

Earth was trembling on the threshold of the stars. Project Satellite was the last frontier to the mystery of space. A hand-picked group of men worked ceaselessly to complete the first interplanetary ship, now that the gravitational problem had been overcome. The completed ship would never see Terra. It was being constructed out here in the cloudless sky, sharing the Satellite's orbit. The huge hulk of the ship grew larger daily, and seemed to crouch in anticipation of its free fall to the moon.

Inside the spinning wheel-shaped structure of the space station life was cramped and monotonous. Peggy was the only person on board who had separate living quarters. That was the sole advantage in being the only woman on a staff of five-hundred men. The place was a bee-hive, made more torturous by

Evelyn Martin and good friend, Mayor G. V. Dismukes, discuss possibilities of annexation for further progress of the lively and growing city of Prichard, Alabama.

the variated gravity, ranging from the near norm of the outside deck to the complete absence of any at the air lock and cargo hatch in the Hub.

On the outside deck, within the door that separated the one marked 'Celestial Observation' from the one marked 'Terrestrial Observation', was Big Mike. He was one of the most perfect electronic brains ever devised by man. He was tireless, an ogre that must be tended and fed. No one was allowed to attend to this delicate duty but one of the specialists who had helped to create him. Such a man was Chip Nelson

On the fateful day, Peggy was happily thinking of the feel of green grass under her feet, and the smell of blossoms in the air. It was springtime, and she was tired and worn with the strain of the past months. She wore her auburn hair pulled back tightly, with horn rimmed glasses covering her dark eyes, and her face was bare of cosmetics.

Chip was sorry she was going home. Her six months on duty were drawing to a close. He remembered the young girl who had first arrived on the Project, dewy with innocence and wide eyed with amazement at the newness of everything. He had watched the gradual change in her with dismay.

She had learned quickly to hide as much of her feminity as was plausible under shapeless sweaters and faded dungarees. Disillusion came quickly. She had seen too many men stripped of their decencies in a womanless routine. She had been watched by so many hungry eyes, heard so many passionate whispers, that she felt soiled and contaminated. That she had kept herself apart was a credit to her. It would take a long time to get all her memories of men as creatures of lechery and lust out of her mind. Peggy was tired, and she was glad she was going home. Chip knew he would miss her. They had worked well together.

Everything was just as usual on the eventful morning. She and Chip went

Mutual admiration society? Author Evelyn Martin holds the music for her favorite singer, Jack Cardwell, while Jack sings to his favorite author.

about their work mechanically, under the hum of Big Mike's busily turning gears, and the steady clatter of Peggy's card punch machine. Neither of them could have told you the exact moment when they felt the mood of tenseness sweep from nowhere and envelope the Satellite.

That same tenseness seemed to occur everywhere on the Project. When men work with death looking over their shoulders, they develop a kind of sixth sense that warns them when something unusual has occurred. There are vague danger signals that can not be defined. They are in the slight cessation of ordinary sound, the increased tempo of an officer's step in the long hall. Men ceased what they were doing, and listened. When they heard nothing, they returned to their work, but their faces were taut. They knew something was happening.

In the room that housed Big Mike, the two turned sharply as the door opened and Commander Stone entered the room, flanked by two civilian scientists.

"We must plot a navigational course, Miss Lane. As rapidly as possible, please." He threw several sheets of paper onto the apron of her card punch machine. The men stood, white faced, as she began to punch the necessary information into the stacks of cards. There was no sound save the buzzing clatter of her machine. As the last card slid into the hopper, she removed the little stack of cards with one hand, and turned her swivel chair to the verifier that stood behind her. The cards whipped through it rapidly, under fingers blurring with the rapidity of motion. Chip was waiting for them when she finished.

"Just a moment, sir, while I sort in information already on file." He addressed his words to the Commander and busied himself with the controls of Big Mike. The men waited quietly, the look on their faces indicative of the

importance of the answer. The sounds of Big Mike in action rose, fell, died. Chip gave them the computation silently.

One of the scientists sighed. "It's true, all right. There is no doubt."

The Commander's face turned haggard. "Then all this work, this effort, these lives, are wasted."

"Not at all, sir. I must repeat, there is no indication of hostility."

Chip interrupted. "I beg your pardon, sir, but could you let us know what has happened?"

The Commander sighed. "I don't suppose it will do any harm. Everyone will soon know. An object has been sighted by Radar Control. It is man-made, a ship from some alien world, hurtling toward us. We have checked its route in every possible way. There is no doubt that their destination is our landing port here at the Satellite!"

Peggy felt her hand clutch Chip's arm, and his muscle tissue was rigid beneath her grip.

HER food seemed tasteless that night, though the vegetables were fresh from their hydroponic gardens, and the meat from deep-freeze. The men about her ate silently, their eyes fixed on the rostrum at the end of the hall. The man who waited there was stooped, elderly, within whose eyes the fires of genius smouldered. He waited until the last fork had been laid down. Then he rose and began speaking to the assembly quietly.

"My friends. I have been asked to talk to you tonight upon a matter of the gravest importance. You are all here on the Project for various reasons, known best to yourselves. Only one thing I do know is shared by you all, and that is a love of adventure and an unquestioned loyalty to our world. We are striving together here toward a common goal. Each of us contributes in his own fashion toward its attainment. We are seeking the conquest of space!

"As we know, someone has beaten us to it. Out there, in the star filled blackness that surrounds us even as I speak, a ship from some alien world is hurtling toward us. The question that confronts us now is—friend or foe? A joining of hands across the void, or an encounter to death? Tomorrow will give us the answer to that question. We have no defenses against an attack from outer space. We are, in effect, a sitting duck. We can only proceed with one thought, one hope—and that is friendship

"It is our belief that these visitors are from our sister planet, Venus. We do not think they will seek war. There is only a lone ship, not an armada. I cannot speak to each of you individually, but I shall try to answer the two most important questions. One, what do we know about Venus; and two, what kind of living creature may we expect to come from the planet?

"To answer the first, I can only say that we know little of our sister planet. We of Earth have always looked to Mars when we sought life. Venus is hidden under so many miles of blinding clouds that our best astronomers, even here on the Satellite, have never viewed her surface. The spectrograph shows no evidence of either oxygen or water vapor. Therefore we must assume her cloud banks to be something other than the water droplets that form our own.

"We now believe these clouds to consist of formaldehyde. This presents another enigma. A certain amount of water vapor is needed in the formation of clouds. Pure formaldehyde gas is unclouded. Add to it a minute and undetectable amount of water vapor, and immediately you produce a thick white cloud.

"There is an enormous amount of carbon dioxide present above the cloud banks. The formaldehyde gas is formed by the action of ultra violet light upon

a mixture of carbon dioxide gases and water vapor. To make Venus more of a mystery, this process liberates free oxygen gas.

"Since there is so little evidence of oxygen in the spectrum, it must go somewhere. We believe it is removed from the atmosphere by weathering, and combining with other elements. We do not believe that life as we know it can exist on Venus. If conditions are more favorable beneath these countless miles of opaque clouds, they must follow some processes of which we are unfamiliar.

"We are living in a wonderful time. We are all privileged to witness an experience of the ages. The ship should come into port about twelve hundred tomorrow. We will make every possible effort to communicate with these Venusians before their arrival. We ask you all to remain at your posts, where your duties are necessary for the operation of the Satellite. Any others among you who may wish to witness the arrival may turn view screens on the Port at noon tomorrow. Only authorized personnel will proceed to the Hub after you leave this room. You will be notified of all developments by viewphone. We are a hardy breed, we on the Project. There will be no panic. That would be disastrous. Please file outside quietly now, and do not assemble anywhere outside your assigned quarters. I bid you goodnight."

There was to be little sleep aboard the Satellite that night. Everyone's thoughts were jumbled, alternating between fear and hope. So much depended upon that slender craft hurtling hourly toward them through the loneliness of the void. Only there could the answer be found to man's destiny among the stars.

Peggy had been born into a world that had outlawed war as too barbarous and dangerous to be contemplated. She had no recollection of the frightful Years of Chaos, which had purged the desire for conquest from the human race It did not seem strange to her that men might meet these aliens in friendship, though they were from another culture and another world She could not share the fears of treachery and invasion that haunted the older Earthmen. It was inconceivable that *every* race should not recognize another as a friend and equal.

She noticed with a degree of satisfaction that the personnel were respecting the order against assembly. That order was based on sound reason. Too great a shift of weight might injure the delicate balance of the Satellite's orbit. Nervousness was evident, but no panic.

Her sleep was troubled in the false night that finally came, but she slept.

THE progress of the ship was reported at intervals during the morning. The announcer was a very young boy with a habit of running his hand nervously through his hair. Peggy listened carefully as she learned that radio contact had been established with the alien craft. Their language was none known to man. They had vocal chords, and a similar throat structure, but there the similarity ended. Interspersed with the reports were repeated orders from Commander Stone. Extreme caution was to be employed in all contacts with the strange ship, but under no circumstances were the staff to make any overt moves toward the strangers unless in self defense or in protection of the Satellite.

As the fateful hour neared, all work ceased on the Project. People began to gather in the assembly halls and recreation rooms—anywhere that held a view screen.

Peggy went with Chip, holding his hand tightly. She felt more at ease with him than with most of the men on the Satellite. The men gathered in the recreation room scattered to give her a seat in the place of honor, then regrouped to watch the big screen as it showed the preparation being made, in color, and almost life-size.

Jeff Daniels finds a pair of willing listeners in good friends Evelyn Martin and Jack Cardwell, as he premiers his new hit tune, "Hey, Woman!" on Melody Records.

Men in space suits were crawling over the huge nets that covered the hub of the station to assist them in moving in and out of the gravity free area. The landing port was swinging open, waiting to receive the ship. Air locks were tightly closed into the rest of the Satellite, waiting for the oxygen to be renewed after the ship had been safely berthed.

Now the view changed to the garish white and blackness of the outside The ship could be seen, a microscopic speck in the distance. Peggy could hear her heart throbbing in the stillness of the room. The ship was looming large now, its design not too different from the one they were building outside the Satellite.

It was time. There were tense faces and troubled minds as they saw the ship make contact. Every operational man in the Hub was at his station, and every eye within was glued to the view screens as the port doors closed about the monstrous vessel and oxygen hissed as it began to refill the airless hub. There was no sign of movement, of motion. Everything was just as it had been, except that now they housed the monster within their shell.

Still they waited. It was many minutes before the oxygen supply was sufficiently replenished to carry sound. More minutes elapsed before they heard metal clanging within the ship. The machinery was being set in motion to open the ship's doors, closed so long against the vacuum of space.

Peggy found her breath quickening as she watched the lock door creaking open What strange life form would come through that door. Would it wiggle crawl, or clump along on eight legs?

The first thing to come from the dark opening in the ship did none of these It frisked about like a puppy—but who ever saw a puppy with irridescent blue scales covering its body, and a head that resembled nothing so much as a frog?

From that small animal came little

Coffee break at Russell's Drive In, where all Prichard finds free conviviality. Left to right, owner Dick Russell, singer Jeff Daniels, announcer Vivian Donald, salesman Chuck Blumenthal, author Evelyn Martin, chef James Price, salesman Jimmy Whatley, chief engineer Gene Miller and singer Jack Cardwell.

yelps as it found itself in a gravity-free area, paddling helplessly as it floated about in the vacuum. A startled crew member reached out a hand and guided the little creature to safety on the net where it crouched, obviously frightened out of its wits

"Oh, no!" Peggy breathed involuntarily. Then her breath stopped for a full minute. Out of that ship stepped the most handsome man Peggy had ever seen. He was followed by others, but Peggy had eyes only for him. He must have been wearing magnetic boots, for he walked with little trouble on the metal floor of the Hub. His head was covered with short-cropped curls, and his eyes were intelligent, large, and very blue. His skin was bronze, and his face was the face of every man who has walked through the unknown.

The jerkin strained tightly over his broad shoulders, and his thighs bulged beneath fitted trousers. The clothing he wore seemed to be made of some reptile skin, gleaming slightly golden in the artificial light. It was only when he reached one hand to the little animal scuffling in the net that she noticed his fingers were webbed.

She could see no recognizable weapon upon his tall form. The air lock opened into the Satellite to form an entrance for the welcoming committee to enter the Hub, and the visitor smiled. Peggy saw then that he would need no weapon save that smile. It transformed his face with eager friendliness. Her eyes followed him closely until he was escorted into the interior of the space station, and the lock closed behind him.

LIEUTENANT Bates Lowery came to invite her to sit at Commander Stone's table that night. He was bursting with information, and Peggy was an avid listener.

"The ship really is from Venus. This guy, Prince Thane, who is the big dog, has a mind like a steel trap. The psycho says

he has been talking to him for a couple of hours, and he has already graduated from the first grade. Oh, and this will hand you a laugh. Guess what they are looking for, way down here?"

"I have no idea."

"Women! Long ones, short ones, fat ones, skinny ones—just women. Seems there hasn't been a woman on Venus in several centuries."

"But that is impossible! What do they do, live forever?"

"Seems there was a plague on Venus a long time ago that killed off all the dames. Their docs were pretty far advanced, even then, and they saved the female egg sperms in some special fluid. Can you imagine that? All those big guys hatched like chicks in an incubator! Only catch was, the females still wouldn't hatch. So there are nothing but males on Venus, and the eggs are running out. It is wives or extermination for them. What a lucky break for you girls!"

"For your information, Lieutenant Lowery, your levity is uncalled for. There is a decided surplus of women on Earth since the years of Chaos. I hope everything turns out all right for the poor things."

"You didn't fall for that big Venusian, by any chance?"

"Don't be ridiculous. I think you are joking. How could they get all that information in this length of time?"

"I told you. This Prince Thane is a real bright guy, and our psycho is no slouch himself. The big dark fellow who sticks to the prince like a Siamese twin is the Captain of his Personal Guard, name of Mina. The big blond who hugs the other side is something called a Procuror of Life, near as they can figure it. They call him Athene. None of them have but one name. How screwy can you get?"

"No screwier than you with that outdated slang of yours. Where *do* you pick it up?"

"It is the newest thing, Baby, the very newest thing. At least it was when I left Terra," he added wistfully. "Well, I guess I had better run along and give you a chance to dress for the party. Thane is disappointed over not finding any women up here, and the Commander wants to give him a thrill. So cooperate, will you? I feel honored, myself. The first date any man on this Satellite has been able to make with you, and I had to have an official command to rate it. You know, the Commander must like me a lot'"

He ducked the pillow she threw at him and laughingly closed the door behind him.

Peggy thought of her scanty wardrobe with dismay. She had brought nothing fancy with her when she came up this last time. Then she remembered the green evening dress she had brought with her and worn once on her first trick. Once had been enough. She had folded it neatly and packed it away in tissue paper. The men were bad enough without her adding any external allure.

She pulled out the box, and unfolded the paper tenderly. When she had slipped the dress over her head, she looked at the result in satisfaction. The low bodice nipped in at her tiny waist, and layers of misty green tipple billowed over the velvet of the full skirt. She pinned tiny pink artifical roses at her waist, and in her auburn hair. She had almost forgotten she could look like this. Six months of austerity was a long time.

Lieutenant Lowery came for her early. When they arrived at the dining hall, she saw that the Commander's table had been raised on a sort of dais at the end of the hall. She felt her hands, cold as ice. She seemed to listen, without actually hearing, Bates' light chatter

She was standing there, on the raised platform, when Prince Thane first saw her. The light fell over her hair, turning it to flame. He paused, breaking his long stride, and the others in his group

stopped behind him. He stood still for a long moment, looking at her as though she were an angel. His beautifully molded lips parted over his strong white teeth, and his breath came rapidly.

He was flanked by the two men Bates had described. All of the men were extraordinarily handsome, their subtle differences from Earthmen only enhancing their charm. Her breath trembled in her lungs as he walked the length of the hall toward her, while the people gathered there parted to let him walk through. She noted the sharp click of his boot heel as he walked purposefully, with measured tread. He looked every inch a Prince, even in his travel stained clothes.

Prince Thane was not ashamed of emotion. Tears fringed dark lashes as he took her hand reverently, and gazed at the thing for which he had searched so far, and bridged the gap between worlds to find

"You are—woman." He spoke, and his voice was deep and resonant like an organ chord

Commander Stone stepped forward. "Miss Lane, may I present Prince Thane, of Venus? Prince Thane, this—" he spoke distinctly "—is Peggy Lane."

"Peggylane, woman. Prince Thane, man." Thane spoke again, obviously proud of his progress in the language. Peggy heard a snicker from the male audience, and her face burned as she heard a muttered voice, somewhere in the hall. "Get this guy! He's been seeing too many B-movies on color-vision'"

She met the other twenty-seven members of his crew that night, and could remember scarcely a name. The night passed like a dream. She felt compassion for the prince who had braved space for the salvation of his people, and she tried to make his first night in this strange land a happy one. He was reluctant to leave her after dinner. In fact, he would not, until he received assurances that he could see her again on the morrow. She knew he would soon forget her in the excitement that was to come. As for her, she would always reserve a place in her memories for this prince from another world

She did not see him again after all, for the regular shuttle bus was early on the following morning. She boarded it with no misgivings, looking forward to her vacation on the little southern farm that she called home. It was much later that the special bus, loaded with dignitaries and linguistic experts, arrived from Terra to escort a thoroughly perplexed Thane to their homeland.

SHE was to have only a short week of peace. She drowsed in the sun, and rested, and she had almost forgotten the aliens. She made it a practice never to read the papers when she was on vacation The entire matter was top secret, anyway, and out of her hands.

She had barely awakened the morning she heard her mother urgently rapping on the door. "A Mr. Mallory is here to see you, dear." She opened the door without waiting for an answer. "He just flew in on one of the most streamlined 'copters I have ever seen. He landed in the south pasture, and he came from the World Federation itself! Can you imagine?"

"Oh, bother." Peggy grumbled, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. "What does he want?"

"I don't know, but you ought to hurry. He looks very important."

Mr. Mallory was enjoying a steaming cup of coffee when she walked into the living space. He looked her over (a little insolently, it seemed to Peggy) and remarked, "So you are Peggy Lane."

"That's right. What can I do for you?" She held her cup under the silver spout marked coffee.

"My name is Bruce Mallory. I have been placed in charge of Public Relations for our extra-terrestrial visitors.

Does that clarify matters for you?"

"Hardly. I fail to see what that has to do with me."

"It is my job to see that they are kept happy, and at the same time to educate the people of the world to receive them as friends and equals. As you are aware, the entire episode has been top secret since it happened. Too many of our people remember the Years of Chaos, and a threat of war would find fertile ground upon which to spawn. We have broken the news gradually, through press and color-vision. The public mind has been carefully cultivated to receive the news, because at all costs a panic must be avoided. You made quite an impression on our Prince. He wants to see you, and we can discuss nothing without your presence. The prince is quite unreasonable."

Peggy buttered her toast. "Look, Mr. Mallory. There must be millions of women who would give their plastiforms to meet your prince. Why pick on me?"

"He thinks some fool on the Satellite promised you to him. It is becoming an incident. My colleagues were against it at first, but I persuaded them. Think of the publicity! What a Cinderella story! The white-collar girl, and the Prince of Venus!"

"Let us get one thing straight. I am tired. I have just completed an arduous six months on the Project, doing a job no man wants to do. And speaking of men, I have seen enough of the male animal to last me forever. No offense intended personally, Mr. Mallory, but I can't stand men! I have no intention of becoming anyone's Cinderella. Is that clear?"

"Miss Lane, I do not think you realize the seriousness of the situation. Venus is rich in mineral deposits Earth needs badly, plus a few she never heard of. Trade treaties would be mutually advantageous. In some fields, as in space travel and in medicine, they have far exceeded our feeble efforts. They have a source of power we must have —the dyno fuel and engines with which their space craft is equipped. We need each other. Without us the Venusian race is doomed. Still, every time we attempt to talk with Thane, we run up against the politically insignificant little girl he met on the Satellite. Peggy, you have an obligation to the Earth It is your duty to come back with me!"

"I have done my duty for eighteen months on that stinking Satellite!" Her eyes were flashing. "Thane was nice when he came off that space ship. I felt sorry for him and I admired him a little. I tried to be nice to him. But that doesn't mean he owns me! And what will he be when your publicity hounds get through with him? A puppet on a string. A carbon copy of the rest of them. I don't want to join in your dance of the automatons, and I absolutely refuse to play on your merry-go-round. I wish you would go away and leave me alone. And that" she ended positively "is my final word, Mr. Mallory."

Two hours later she was on her way to Thane

IT was mid-afternoon when they came in for a landing on the huge country estate that had been utilized as a headquarters for the aliens. Looking downward, Peggy was amazed to see the miles of electrically charged wire that enclosed the acres, and the tiny figures of armed guards as they patrolled the region. The roads were jammed with gyrobiles, and hundreds of people stood outside the guarded area, hoping to get a glimpse of the Venusians. Mallory had to identify himself visually several times in the few miles between the protective fencing and the landing field at the big house.

Here everything was quiet and

peaceful. Deep wooded areas screened the visitors from prying eyes, and it was impossible for them to know that four miles away they were ringed by masses of the curious, pushing and crowding as closely as they dared about the spot.

They landed as gently as a feather, and were immediately surrounded by secret service men. In half an hour they were standing at the door to Thane's private quarters, and Captain Mina, Aide and Protector of His Most Royal Highness stood before them.

"The Prince is resting." His accent would have been impossible to describe or duplicate. "You will state your business, I ask?"

Accent or no accent, Peggy was amazed at his rapid mastery of the language. Mallory, surprisingly, spoke to the Captain with respect.

"I have brought Peggy Lane to see the Prince."

Captain Mina's eyes flashed quickly to her face, and upon recognition, he moved aside. "You are welcome. The Prince rests in the pool."

He gestured toward doors that opened onto a tiled terrace and an oblong swimming pool glittering blue in the late sun.

There was no one visible when they walked out onto the lonely terrace. Mallory indicated a chair, but Peggy was staring into the pool with an odd expression on her face. What was that, floating limply near the bottom? Through the refraction of the water, she recognized him. All of their protection had not been enough. It was Thane, and on his bronzed back she could see two long, red, open wounds —wounds apparently inflicted with a knife.

She screamed. Mina rushed through the open terrace, and she screamed again. She went into violent hysterics. She pointed to the pool, to Mina, and to the pool again. Mallory tried frantically to quiet her as Thane rose from the pool.

The wounds in his shoulders closed, and the water drained from them miraculously. Peggy could not believe her eyes. "My God!" she moaned. "Gills! I thought he'd been cut."

"I thought you knew," Mallory was trying to explain through the tumult. "The Venusians are all amphibians. On such a watery world, it is very logical. Hush, Peggy, please hush!"

The only thing that shocked her into silence was the fact that Thane was entirely nude, and entirely unconscious of it. Choking, she turned a modest back, while Mallory's face turned a flaming red.

"Clothe yourself, Prince Thane. Here we have taboos about the nude body between sexes."

Thane laughed in sheer joy. "You have brought me Peggylane. I thank you. In my land there are no taboo. But there are only men. I will dress."

But Peggy had seen enough to assure her that there would be no barriers in regard to anatomy between the men of Venus and the women of Earth. That is, if she could ever get used to the idea of a husband with gills! She shuddered.

When she turned, the prince was clothed in blue trousers of the same reptile skin he had worn on the Satellite. He was as worshipping, as adoring, as he had been upon his first sight of her.

"I am sorry you are frighten. At my home, all babies learn to breathe water before they can breathe air. Air would drown them at birth. Now you cannot see, no?"

His back was as smooth as any Earthman's. The gills closed so tightly that no line was visible.

THE entire area had become nothing more than a laboratory and a college. The Venusians went to school every day, learning the Earth language

and technology. Sometimes she would catch a glimpse of them in the classrooms, where they sat frowning in concentration over their school work. Every time she saw Thane she warmed unconsciously to his unusual beauty. His true personality was still a mystery to her. He lacked words to express himself in her language, though he was learning rapidly. It was next to impossible to understand without a complete exchange of ideas or thoughts. His actions belied his appearance. At first impression, she had sensed a great sternness and masculinity. Docility sat strangely upon him, yet Peggy felt that he followed Mallory's suggestions like a great sheep.

A new department had been added to the World governing body. It was the Department of Interplanetary Relations. Bruce Mallory was tentative Secretary during the emergency. Thane and his men were being prepared for their official unveiling to the public. 3-D photo stills of himself and his crewmen had been widely circulated, accompanying articles extolling their charm and masculinity. Preparing the suckers for the gills, Peggy thought wryly.

Even she was not spared a part in the publicity. They were using her alleged romance with Thane to increase the idea of the amphibian's normality in the minds of the reading and viewing public. Actually, she seldom saw him. He seemed satisfied to know that she was within reach, and he made no effort to deepen their relationship. She could not understand what purpose her presence could serve.

Informality was the keynote in Venusville, as it was now called. She had the freedom of the entire place, and she spent hours wandering around, watching the various activities. There were daily lectures, round table discussions on each new fact they learned from the Venusians. She remembered one lecture in particular. The genetist was speaking on "The Venusian from Egg to Birth."

The lecturer was standing before a blackboard, using his pointer to emphasize the data he had chalked there. Peggy tried to follow him, as he spoke solemnly, "The answer lies in haploid parthogenesis. To the layman that means the development of an egg without fertilization. There are an equal number of chromosomes in both the female ovum and the male spermatazoa. These chromosomes are similar, controlling certain genetic factors, save for two. In the female ovum, these are both called X chromosomes, but in the male sperm, these two sex determining chromosomes are of separate types—one X and one Y. Thus we might say the female is XX and the male XY.

"In the process of maturation of the germ cells in haploid parthogenesis, which results in the formation of gametes with the haploid or half-somatic number of chromosomes, each of the eggs receives only one X chromosome. The egg develops after having been divided in this fashion, with no aid from the male sperm. As there can be only one X chromosome in the resulting embryo, the progeny from haploid parthogenesis are invariably male. If the egg were to undergo fertilization, the embryo might be either XX or XY, considering which type of male sperm made contact with the ovum.

"The Venusians have tried, through the centuries, to fertilize their eggs with sperm, with little result. It is a miracle that they have succeeded at all in the continuance of the race even in the remarkable manner they have perfected.

"There is one comparison I might make to help clarify this. Our common honey bee on Earth makes use of haploid parthogenesis. If the queen bee so decides, she can allow the egg to descend the oviduct and pass the seminal

receptacle containing the sperm acquired during the mating act without fertilization. In such cases a drone occurs. This same drone must also fertilize the next generation, and be the mates of future queens. Their sperm contains only the reduced number of chromosomes. Nature causes a sort of vestigal division to take place, resulting in the formation of a tiny cell without a nucleus, as well as the larger cell with all the chromosomes. The progeny of this drone are always female.

"Now the question arises: Can our Venusians supply the necessary spermatozoa for the next generation of eggs? That we do not know. If there were women on Venus, the next generation would have supplied the answer. The men possess a reduced number of chromosomes, and they cannot very well undergo the reduction division again. Bear in mind that these are men, not bees. If their children result in females exclusively, they have been defeated after their brave battle. The strain of the Venusian will gradually die away completely. If Nature has seen fit to supply them with a vestigal Y chromosome, who can tell?

"The desired union between Earth women and Venusians poses many problems. The Venusian chromosomes differ greatly from the Earth norm. There is no assurance that fertilization *can* take place, or even if it does, that the resulting embryo will not be a monster. I will try to compare differences in the two types of humans before I go further into the development of the test tube embryo, which, incidentally, must live in fluid that we cannot yet duplicate on Earth, for two weeks after birth, before its air lungs can develop."

Unobtrusively, Peggy rose and slipped from the room. This was necessary, but it seemed a little barbaric. She felt vaguely alarmed. Could Mallory be planning to use her, with Thane, as a human guinea pig? She would never agree to it. Never!

As for Thane, he was carefully exploring a new sensation of love. He did not wish to frighten away this delicate creature, so fragile and precious to him. He did not know how Earthlings went about this matter of love. He walked carefully, testing his ground before each move. He longed for this woman with strange passions, newly roused.

Both of them were to be on exhibition at the official reception to be held in the huge auditorium of the World Building. After that was over, perhaps the customs of this world would be satisfied, and he could turn his undivided attention to Peggy.

PEGGY'S gown was a masterpiece of the dressmaker's art. Mallory had been playing up the Southern Belle angle, and she looked like a girl straight from the days of the ancient Civil War of American history. The dress was stark white, the dainty ruffled skirt swaying on huge hoops about her feet. Her shoulders were bare, gleaming above a froth of creamy lace. There was a blood red flower blooming at her waist. It was an exotic touch, coming as it did straight from the Venusian jungles. Thane had called it a ninet, and he had plucked it personally from the plants growing in his ship as oxygen replenishers

When the prince presented himself at her door, she could see why such care had been taken in the selection of her gown. Thane was wearing white himself — the gleaming white of purest snow drifts. The men in his retinue were clothed in the same scarlet of the ninet.

The anticipation of the night drained from Peggy. It was a show, carefully prepared for colorvision, and they were mere actors on a stage. Cinderella and her prince. The simile could

not be more apt. They looked the part, dressed the part, and it only remained for them to play the part. He was a cardboard prince, a pretty image. So she smiled a cardboard smile as she took his arm, and the camera turned to colorvise their pictures over the world. Peggy and her Prince of Venus.

He had no opportunity to speak to her alone. He did give her arm a gentle squeeze with his brown hand, and she looked up into his steady eyes. They were so kind and quiet. If only he were not so darned handsome, or so darned sweet!

The pageant moved like clockwork, leaving Venusville with a police escort. When they reached the outskirts of the city, they found the streets lined with cheering crowds of both sexes, all the way to the World Building. There the gyrobiles came to a stop, one by one, at the entrance, imposing with the walk closed off by crimson ropes. Thane's men, lead by Captain Mina, dismounted first and formed two lines, giving their Prince a path between them. Peggy was dazzled by the brilliant lights and surging crowds.

She and Thane led the dancers, moving like a floating mist across the polished floor. They danced smoothly, effortlessly, with Thane showing no indication of the torturous lessons he had undergone for this one dance, he who had never danced in all his life. Peggy would not have been a woman had she not felt a thrill of conquest at being held in this man's arms. He was the man of the hour, the man of the year. All this pageantry and pomp was directed only toward him. One by one his men joined in the dance, with the carefully chosen escorts who had been waiting for them here. Peggy saw Captain Mina as he danced past them with a dark girl in his arms. She recognized her as Ellen Dowling, debutante of the season. The spoiled darling of society was looking at the Captain with star-kissed eyes and a look upon her face that could not be mistaken. Apparently, no one was immune from the unusual charm of their strange visitors.

They walked out into the garden later, she and Thane, where a colored fountain was misting the evening air. She stared upward where the moon was full and golden. For the first time she felt about it as another world, a globe in space. The familiar had become unreal. The pinpoints of stars were other worlds to her in reality now, and not lessons learned in school. Suddenly, she turned to Thane, and spoke.

"This cannot go on, Thane, why is it me you want? I am very fond of you, but I do not love you. I don't even know you very well. For you there could be many women."

"I do not know this thing that you call love," he answered. "I only know that when I saw you I saw my dream of woman. I want to take you home with me, home to Venus."

"That I could never do! I am going away, Thane."

A pulse jumped in Thane's throat, and she saw that his hands clenched. He took her arm, and pointed into the darkness. In the shadows, she saw two persons, wrapped together in a long embrace. With a catch in her heart, Peggy recognized Mina and Ellen Dowling. She turned her eyes away, vaguely disturbed.

"They love," Thane said, simply. "Why can you not love me? Have you tried to love me?"

"No. Can't you see, Thane? Love comes from within. No person can make another love."

"Would you let me try?"

"What do you mean?"

"On my ship, the Sista, there is a small cruiser . . . a life boat, you Earthlings would call it." He looked upward toward the moon, and her eyes followed his. "I would like to take you there, with me."

"Alone?"

"With Mina as pilot. Only around your moon, and then back to your Terra. Would you go there, with me?"

Peggy shivered. "Out there, where an Earthman has never gone before?"

"I should like for you to be the first person from your world who leaves it for another. Perhaps I can speak to you, out there, in a way that you can understand."

She was suddenly afraid. "How do I know you will bring me back?"

"I would do anything you wished me to do. We could go no further, not in the cruiser."

"And if it comes to nothing, will you agree to my leaving?"

"Yes."

"Then I will go."

Silently, they walked back, together, to the lights and the music.

AFTER that night, Peggy felt her tenderness for the Prince increasing. She sometimes felt that she could have loved him if it had not been for Bruce Mallory and his underlings. To anything they suggested, Thane was amenable. Peggy thought they made him ridiculous. They plastered his name and picture over the papers. Thane milking a cow; Thane in an American Indian's headdress; Thane in a bathing suit. Advertising signs flickered, "If you would be a man like Thane, you must never have a pain, use Blotto's aspirin." It disgusted her, and caused him to lose dignity in her eyes.

Every woman on Earth had seen and admired the men from Venus, either in person or on colorvision. Though slightly different from Earthmen, those differences were more than overcome by their attitude toward the fair sex. Womanless for so long, every woman was a priceless treasure to be cherished by them. And women being what they were, clubs were springing up over the countryside; their members planning to apply for places on the Star Queen and the other great colonizing ships to be prepared for Venus.

Contracts and treaties were being agreed to, signed, and witnessed. Thane spent part of each day with the biologists, linguists and other sundry experts of Earth. Each day they learned more about Venus. The Venusians had their own group of experts who were analyzing the flora, fauna, and civilization of Earth. Athene, Procurer of Life, was working closely with Earth's best doctors in the hospitals and clinics. Every continent had been visited by one of the twenty-seven men who had followed their Prince to Terra.

Thane spent a long time in Mallory's office the day he told him of his plan to take Peggy to the moon. At first Bruce was aghast at the idea of wasting the valuable time and fuel, just to take a mere girl around Luna.

"I do not intend to take my big ship," Thane explained patiently. "Just the small cruiser within it. It is not dyno-powered, but atomic. I want Peggy, Bruce. Maybe, out there, I can make her see things my way."

Mallory smiled wryly. "I doubt it. Why don't you give it up, Thane? You haven't a chance of cracking the ice around that unnatural female."

"Perhaps I have methods unfamiliar to you."

"Good luck to you. We have an old saying here: 'All's fair in love and war'."

Thane looked at him keenly. "This is true? If so, perhaps the thing I plan is not as wrong as I think it is."

Nobody heard the conversation between Thane and Mina, later that night. Mina was horrified.

"Thane, you wouldn't use your mento against these Earthlings? They would not understand the meaning of the term. I, too, have seen into their minds, and they have no defense. It

is better that they do not know we possess mento. To use it against a woman you want - - that goes against all our teachings."

"But she loves me, I tell you she does!" Thane was vehement. "Have I not seen within her mind,, seen the block there that keeps her from knowing it herself? If I can only bring it out into the open, the block would be destroyed!"

"I hope you know what you are doing," Mina declared fervently. "It is not just that I should find my mate before my Prince, but Ellen and I wish to be married as soon as possible. I have found that women can make you agree to strange things. If mento will make Peggy marry you, then use it with my blessings."

For a long time Peggy had been on guard against any overtures Thane might make toward her. She was tense and ill at ease in his presence. Then she found that no one can remain on guard forever. Though Thane did not realize it, he had found the surest way to stir Peggy's interest. As she began to relax in his presence, she found herself wishing with the perverseness of woman that he would at least try to kiss her, or speak of that deep love he professed so that she could persuade him again that it was hopeless. She even found herself flirting with him, trying to stir him from what she considered his lethargy. Did these Venusians have no red blood in their veins? Had centuries of austerity killed all sex-drive, all desire?

She knew, somehow, that the climax would come on the journey to the moon. She felt the power within him, the emotion and fire that lay behind his calm exterior. Why was he so meek, so mild, so stupidly one with the herd?

Thane steeled himself to wait. It was not yet time. Soon they would be in space, away from her people and his own. There they could be man and woman, not Venusian and Earthling. He knew it was difficult for her to become accustomed to his strangeness. With her beauty she must have had her choice of many of her own kind. To him she would always be the only woman who had ever existed. She was the first he had ever seen, and to him she was the symbol of all womankind. He would never forget her, as he had seen her first, in the mist-like dress the green of the young tupa trees on his native Venus. Her hair had been a misty radiance, her lips flower-like in the perfect oval of her face. His hands yearned to caress the gentle curves, to hold her, love her forever. But duty to Venus came first. He must follow all Mallory's dictates, for if he never found happiness, woman must go to Venus. If things did not work out for him - - well, when he came back, he would perform the ceremony that would make Mina and Ellen man and wife and let them begin the new race.

They boarded the shuttle bus together—she, Thane, and Mina. Ellen Dowling was there, clinging to her Captain possessively, throwing herself into his arms for their farewell kiss This was one Venusian who needed no prodding, Peggy thought bitterly.

She was beginning to grow frightened. She was the first to go up there, where no Earthling had ever been before. How did she know she would return? Strange perils and dangers might await her. She might die, up there in the blackness, with no one to see—or care. Black panic welled up before her The field was crowded with reporters and photographers. She felt herself gasping for air, smothered in the mob about her. She wanted to get out of all this, go back to the peaceful nonentity she had been before the *Sista* came to plague her. It was then that Thane pushed his big body between her and the encraoching crowd. Taking her arm firmly, he guided her

steps into the shuttle bus. Somehow she smiled and waved at the blurred sea of faces beneath her, before she collapsed, exhausted, into the contour seat

Beside her, Thane, and Mina there were Mallory and two of his staff, and Salen, second in command under Mina A personal guard for a personal guard for a personal guard, she thought hysterically. With difficulty, she swallowed her fears and buckled the straps over her legs and shoulders. Thane smiled at her encouragingly.

They felt movement as the platform on which the bus was mounted swung up and over the jet deflectors which would drain off the fiery gases of the rocket motors. Then came the roar, the thrust, the drive. Peggy felt her ribcase cracking, her face flattening and buckling under the awful pressure. It was only seconds later when the gyropilot tilted the ship into a more gentle curve, and the pressure was off.

They did not go into the Satellite. The small cruiser had been rolled from the great ship, and floated by its side like a nursling. The *Star Queen* floated here, too, like the *Sista*. There was no need to anchor them in any way, for they, too, had become satellites, moving at the same speed, and balanced by the same pull between speed and gravity as the mother satellite.

Peggy gasped when they entered the interior of the small cruiser. It was luxurious, though tiny. The pile and jets were closed in the rear, and there was a comfortable, book-lined lounge before them. Peggy noticed that the books were magnetized, and the soft chairs and sofas were bolted to the steel floor - - or what would be the floor when the centrifuge was turned on in space. Around the walls beneath the bookcases were narrow hydroponic gardens, beautiful with strange and foreign plants. They were oxygen replenishers, an auxiliary to the regular oxygen tanks.

To their left was a well-stocked little kitchen, each utensil lying with its own magnetized strip holding to its alternate strip. It was spotless. In the nose of the little craft were the instruments and control room, a little unit in itself. On the right a thin metal door led into a bedroom, resembling one of Earth, with odd differences. The bed could not be called so with correctness. It was circular, reminding one of a gigantic sultan's bassock. The pillows snapped to its soft downy covering

Peggy was having trouble navigating in the gravity-free ship. Thane and Mina moved expertly, with the familiarity of long experience. Mina disappeared into the control room, where she could see him checking his instruments and preparing for takeoff. Thane noticed Peggy's discomfort. With a few deft movements, the sofa was converted into a wide acceleration couch. He placed her there, gently, and seated himself beside her. The straps were buckled. She was committed. There was no sensation of up or down, other than the senses she had always used telling her that the chair upon which she sat was bolted to the floor, which was down. It had to be. Hadn't it always been?

A grating sound at the side of the ship caught her attention, and with a sickening lurch, the ship began to move. Thane smiled at her. "They are moving us away from the Satellite, so our initial thrust will not damage it. It is almost time for take-off. Are you frightened?"

"I would be an awful liar if I said I wasn't," she whispered weakly.

"I will stay with you. Mina can complete the checking alone. The cruiser has not been in space since we left home. We have to make sure she is spaceworthy."

"Do they call ships 'she,' even on Venus?"

He looked at her searchingly. "Everything beautiful, holding the hope of man is feminine—everywhere."

Mina came to the door of the control room. He stopped there, and saluted his prince. He raised his right hand, kissed the fingers, and touched those fingers to his forehead before opening them to Thane.

"Prepare for take-off," he said to them, and closed the metal doors behind him.

Thane sent probing fingers into her mind. Now was the time. Now, while her defenses were down, he could reach deeply, free inhibitions. He lowered the backrest, and lay beside her, fastening his own straps, as he began to talk to her soothingly.

"It is almost time. This is little worse than the shuttle bus on the trip from your planet to the station. Your moon is roughly two hundred and thirty-eight thousand miles away. We are already moving with the same speed of the Satellite—almost sixteen thousand miles an hour. All we need is a short rocket thrust, enough to increase our speed to about twenty-two thousand miles an hour. That will throw us in a long arc away from the Earth. The ship will fall freely the rest of the way, until it almost comes to a stop on the other side of your moon, when we will fall back again to the Earth. Do you understand?"

"I suppose so." She shivered. "The dark side of the moon. No one has ever seen the dark side of the moon."

"You shall see it now."

Mina's voice, curiously metallic, came from a wall grating.

"Five minutes to take-off."

Peggy looked at the handsome face, lying so near her own. His lashes were dark, fringing his blue eyes with shadowed dusk. His skin was smooth and brown over his perfect skull bones, with a rosy glow that crept through the bronze. His nose was straight, with flaring, sensitive nostrils.

"Four minutes to take-off."

Thane looked with worship at the lovely face framed in red-gold mist. Earth-woman, dream woman, womb of life, vessel of passion and beauty. This was no time for talk, for words. Before they returned, she would be his. He could feel her, now, beginning to warm to him. Shadowed eyes, under arching brows. Lips full, almost sulky with the passion hiding there. Tendrils of hair, damply clinging and curling on an ivory cheek .

"Three minutes to take-off."

Pulse beating in a strong brown throat. Huge chest, rising, falling rhythmically. And beneath that chest, strange organs. Gills, water-breathing amphibian. Monster, or masculine perfection? Want you, want your lean brownness against me. Alien, stranger, lover—bulging thighs, webbed fingers, gentle fingers, crisply curling hair—

"Two minutes to take-off."

Gods of the Sea! Her lips, her eyes, her slender hands! What must it be, this thrust of loins against female softness, this pouring out of one's vitals into a vessel of love? Woman, gentle woman, come to me, give me of your beauty, power, strength—ease my yearning, oh blessed one—

"One minute to take-off."

A merging together of thoughts, of feeling, emotion; whirling, spinning, rising, falling, lips parting to quickened breath, eyes clouding with mutual want. Arms strapped, hands straining to meet. The brown webbed fingers and the slender white ones merging, clutching holding, meeting, clinging, eyes speaking to eyes, pulses pounding together through tight clenched hands.

It is time. The roar, the thrust, sinking together in the awful pressure, eyes locked, hands locked, hearts locked, sinking to the vortex of blackout.

THE first thing that came with returning consciousness was the realization that her hand was still clasped in his own. She smiled at him, and whispered, "How did you know, Thane? How did you know it would be like this between us, out here?"

She thought she saw a look of pain in his eyes, but she could not be sure. She was trying to analyze this new emotion. She was seeing the true Thane for the first time. This was no weakling, no creature of another's bidding. This was Man, as Man should be, the master of his fate.

After Mina put the ship into centrifuge, everything was as normal as it had been aboard the Satellite. The silver ship sped ever onward through the nothingness of space, as Thane released her from her bonds.

"I want to show you something," he told her when she was free. "Look."

He flicked a switch, and a panorama came into being on the big plasticite screen that covered half of one wall. She sat in silence and viewed the strange mysteries before her, as she realized she was looking into infinity. Through the velvet blackness the stars shone with a cold light, and she felt the silence and the emptiness in her soul. Nothing seemed to be moving out there. She could see a part of the Earth far below, so lush and beautiful and dear - - and distant. She was the first person to look down upon it from the void, the first to stretch her umbibical cord so far from Mother Earth. She was alone in this beauty, this solemnity, with Thane.

As if in answer to her thoughts, he came and stood beside her. The dim light outlined his handsome face, and she saw the play of muscle in his mighty arms. This was a new Thane who stood before her now, a man at home in an environment that was made for him, free of the subterfuge and indecision of his Earthling advisors. Her heart was stripped of its callousness and sham, and she saw him as he really was - - a giant, with his head among the stars. She felt a warmth creep through her body, a strange yearning for the man beside her. Involuntarily, she moved closer to him, feeling the pulse pounding in her throat.

"Do you know now why I brought you here?" His words were soft, but masterful. He was one with the vastness, and the darkness, and the quiet.

"I think I do." There was a catch in her throat.

"This is a strangely new thing for me, this thing you Earthmen call love. How could I know love who have never known woman? Not even as a babe was I held in a woman's arms. Yet now I have strange desires and yearnings, that have not been known on my planet for generations."

He turned his large eyes and looked deeply into hers. She felt her head swimming, her mouth dry.

"I offer you the stars for your marriage bed, and the moon for your pillow. Together we can found a new world, and a new species of humanity. What do you say, Peggylane?"

He drew her into his arms, and her lips found his in their first kiss. As he released her, she saw behind him the green radiance of Earth. It was like a dream, a strange dream of wild emotions and surging pulses

"I want it to be now, Peggylane. Soon we will round the dark side of the moon, and we will be returning to your Earth. Will you marry me now, by the ancient ceremony of my land, wherein the Princes have always taken their brides? I translated it, to the best of my ability, before we left Earth. What is your answer?"

"Suddenly, I am so sure—so sure of everything. Yes, Thane, it shall be as you say. I know now that I love you, that I have always loved you."

"This is reality, Peggylane, the only

reality. They speak of divorce on your world. These are solemn and ancient vows. They have never been broken. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Thane."

"Then will you kneel here by my side, and place your right hand upon my heart, as I do the same toward you?"

They knelt together, and she felt the beating of his strong heart beneath her slender hand. The moon could be seen now, growing ever nearer, the pits and craters white against black shadow. She felt this moment in the center of her being as she knew she would never feel another, and she listened in reverent silence as the resonant voice began to recite the Holy words.

"By the Gods of the Heavens, and the Gods of the Sea

By all that is holy, to you and to me

May we love in the springtime, and mate in the fall,

By the Grace of that one, who is King over all."

He lifted his hands gently now, and placed them on her shoulders first, then on her head.

"May our lives be fertile, and our hearts serene.

I, Prince Thane of Venus, do make you my Queen.

You shall rule by my side, 'til the dark comes at last,

And then lie by my side, 'til the shadows have passed."

He raised her to her feet, and she went to him gladly.

MINA stayed in the control room throughout the entire voyage. Thane and Peggy loved the hours away, their happiness a magic, tangible thing.

Peggy was too happy to analyze her sudden change of heart. She was with Thane, and that was enough. No girl ever had such a honeymoon. They were within two hours of the Satellite before she experienced the first misgivings.

Everything seemed so right and normal up here. But Earth's teeming millions were growing nearer by the minute, and she had to face the public opinion of her unorthodox marriage in the sky. The habits of a lifetime could not be forgotten easily. Their idyll in the sky might be considered just that, and nothing more. She had committed herself to a future she could not visualize.

Thane was sprawled on the couch bed, bare from the waist up, his long legs encased in their snug trousers and boots. Peggy was sitting beside him, idly fondling the crisp brown curls on his brow. She watched his smooth brown chest move with his breathing, and for the first time since they had left Earth, she thought of his gilled back. He knew an underwater existence she could never share. She had married an alien, a creature of whom she knew nothing. He was talking now happily, of taking her away to his own land, and suddenly, she did not want to go. Everything within her rebelled at the thought, screamed against it.

"Thane," she asked desperately, "why do we have to go back? The *Star Queen* will take many women to Venus. Your mission is accomplished. The race of man will live again there. Let us go back, and be married in the custom of my land, and stay here on Earth. I am afraid."

She had never seen him angry. His face set, his eyes turned stormy.

"Marry again? We are married. Are you ashamed of lying in my arms? Is it Earth custom to be ashamed of your love? We are married by a ritual far older than your own. I thought our differences were at last resolved, and we had reached an understanding. We must go home to Venus. I am a Prince of the Realm, and my duty lies with my country."

"You never argue with Mallory!" she flashed jealously. "I have never noticed you disagreeing with anything he wants!"

"I have a duty to my people," he answered, white-faced. "I know nothing of your customs. My personal dignity is unimportant, if by any action of mine, Earthwomen can be persuaded to leave their world for Venus. I have followed every stupid order, allowed outrages upon my person. Now plans are definitely under way for sending the first group to Venus, as soon as your *Star Queen* is refitted with dynopower. My part is over, and my patience grows short. I can see why you might be afraid, but as your husband, I promise you my understanding and help to overcome all of the strangeness of your new world."

"Only promise me that we will have an Earth ceremony when we return, and I will try to decide about the other. Please, Thane."

He rose, and slipped into his tunic. "I will not quarrel with you. You alone know what you must do. Have your ceremony, but have it quickly. I will not wait too long."

He left her alone and miserable. The worm had turned, with a vengeance. She knew he was angry, and very, very upset.

MALLORY received the news of their marriage with mixed emotions. He leaned back in his chair and puffed furiously on the black cigar clenched between his teeth.

"This brings up complications," he growled. "We want Thane to make a world tour. The other members of the World Federation must not be made to feel that America is monopolizing him. You seem to be agreed on an Earth ceremony, but an American wife would complicate matters. Thane is our principal asset on such a trip. He, as the Prince, is a symbol of the idea we are trying to foster. When he returns to America, I think the engagement might be formally announced. A huge wedding, of course, with suitable publicity. The other marriage, of course, must be kept secret in the interim. Yes, I think it might work out very well."

Peggy glanced at Thane. He was rigid, white-faced, waiting for her to arrange everything. She sighed in exhaustion.

"Suppose we do not want a big wedding?" She was beginning to rebel. "Suppose we just get married without all that fanfare and publicity?"

"Neither of you belong to yourselves any longer. I fail to see why you do not understand that. Women do not volunteer spontaneously for a hazardous and unfamiliar experience such as the one that confronts us. They must be flattered, pushed, led, into it. Your romance can be an important factor. We can do nothing, save try to cover up your mistakes. I sincerely hope you will make none."

"What do you think, Thane?" She turned to him, helplessly.

"I cannot believe the manner in which we are married can have any influence on my mission. I was willing to do anything to assure the importance of my mission when I first came here. As I learn your manners and customs, I understand everything better. Earth needs Venus as badly as Venus needs Earth."

"But Mallory says—"

"Mallory is essentially an actor, putting on a big show. You make the decision."

Mallory smiled. "It is necessary that we keep you under constant supervision, in the event of pregnancy. We must know if these marriages can produce progeny, and the result of the mating if they can. I understand Captain Mina and Ellen Dowling are marrying also?"

"Yes. I will unite them this after-

noon."

"Then we will have another chance to observe. Impress upon him the importance of impregnating her as soon as possible."

Peggy rose to her feet shaking with anger. "Stop talking about us as though we were animals!" she raged. "Have your silly tour, and I will do what you advise, but I am disgusted with the entire business!"

Mina was waiting for them outside in a gyrobile. Both Peggy and Thane were angry. They were driving mutely back to Venusville when it happened. It might not have happened at all if Thane had not felt so rebellious

They were driving along a thoroughfare that led past a public park. The traffic was unusually heavy, for they were brought to a standstill every few feet. A soapbox orator was ranting on the edge of the park, surrounded by sleepy winos and people with nothing better to do than to stop and listen.

Thane leaned forward suddenly, and Peggy realized the man in the park was discussing the Venusians. She had not been listening, but now his words entered her consciousness with a rush.

"The pee-pul must not stand idly by and allow this thing to happen! The powers that be are selling the finest flower of our young womanhood into slavery! Shall your daughters—your future wives and mothers—be sold for more gold to pour into the hungry coffers of the rich? Shall our little girls be sent into slavery to wallow in the slime with frogs? My friends, these people are not humans at all, but aliens! And aliens can never be human! We will not let anyone make concubines of our daughters! Send the frogs back to Venus, I say! Send the frogs back to Venus!"

Peggy looked at Thane, horror in her eyes. His eyes were burning, his mouth outlined in white parentheses. Mina must have noticed him at the same time, for he caught the Prince by the arm swiftly, and spoke to him in Venusian too rapidly for her to follow. All Peggy could catch was the Venusian word for "No."

The traffic crawled along, and she could not look again until they were halted a few feet further along the street. The man in the park seemed to have suffered some sort of a seizure. His face was purple and mottled and he had difficulty breathing. Some of his followers were supporting him, and all were speaking excitedly.

"Wha-what happened to him?" Peggy asked in amazement.

"He will be all right." Thane's voice was clipped.

"But—"

"I said he will be all right." One look at his face silenced her, and she began to think. She knew that Thane had something to do with the man's attack. How it happened she did not know, for he had not moved a muscle from the time the man's voice had reached them.

She did not mention the affair until they were home in Venusville. Then he answered her ambiguously.

"He called us frogmen. That is an insult. We are as warm-blooded as you are. Is that why you have turned so cold to me? Do you, too, think of me as a frogman?"

His words came too close to the truth for Peggy's comfort. She lashed out at him, defending herself by her cruelty.

"What did you do to him? What power do you possess of which we know nothing?"

"He angered me. It was a mistake. Forget it."

"Then you do have some power over us, some mental power. Tell me, Thane! Tell me!"

"It is a power of the mind, a thing we call mento. It would be difficult for you to understand."

He was unprepared for the effect

his words would have upon her. She looked at him in horror and disgust.

"So that is why I learned to love you so strangely! There is a thing on our world called fair play, and you do not know the meaning of it! I never want to see you again. I am leaving you, Thane."

She turned, and was gone, though he tried to stop her. She went out and got into her gyrobile, and drove through the night. She never remembered the details of that trip. She did not stop until she was at home.

There were nights when Peggy cried into her pillow. Now that she had left him, all she could remember was his heart beating against hers, and his lips scorching upon her own. Yet it had been a lie, and the entire experience was a dream with no reality, a dream from which she had experienced a rude awakening. She heard of the marriage of Mina and Ellen. They were together as naturally and beautifully as every man should be with his chosen mate. Ellen had a kind of bravery that Peggy did not possess. Peggy wondered if she knew about mento.

She saw Thane on colorvision during the weeks he was away on Mallory's tour. The sight of his handsome face, a little bitter now, almost made her forget her pique. Still her heart would harden again as she remembered the fool he had made of her, and the responsibilities involved in loving this man.

On the day that Thane was scheduled to return, Peggy woke irritable and headachy. An unaccustomed nausea kept her abed until late in the day. She had worked herself into a frenzy of nerves and imagined slights by the afternoon. He could never have chosen a more inopportune time to come to her.

For he did come. He came bursting into her bedroom as though he had a right there, as though it were not her parents' home. She was the picture of outraged innocence as he caught her in his arms and buried his face in her hair. She turned her cheek coldly when his questing lips sought hers, and pushed him away angrily.

"You are trespassing in my father's house," she told him coldly. "Please go."

"Do you really mean that? I love you, Peggy. Have you forgotten that you are my wife?"

"I hate you!" she cried unreasonably. "That stupid ceremony was no marriage! You have done nothing but make me unhappy. Why did you ever come here!"

Thane was magnificent in his anger as he had never been in his gentleness. Thane the man had suffered long, but Thane the Prince had taken enough.

"Very well." His eyes flashed fire. "When you realize that you are my wife, I will be waiting for you. Now you shall come to me. I will teach you what it means to be the wife of a Prince!"

White-faced, he turned on his heel and went out of the door, slamming it behind him. The shock of his anger sobered her like a dash of cold water. Peggy was speechless. She opened her mouth to call him back, and then closed it again. He would come back anyway. He had always come back.

But the hours passed and he did not return. It was dark when her mother called her to the viewphone. She gave a little sob of relief.

It was Mina's white face, however, that showed in the screen.

"Where is Thane? Where is he?" The words tumbled over themselves in her hurry to utter them.

"The Prince has departed." Mina's voice was tired and strained. "He came to me late in the day, very upset and angry. In one hour he made me Ambassador to the Earth, appointed Salen as my assistant, bid Mallory a rapid farewell, and left for Venus after

gathering the remainder of the crew."

Peggy almost blacked out, so great was her shock and unbelief. "No!" she muttered blankly. "No. He couldn't have."

"But he did. I am afraid the prince is headstrong."

"Did he not send some word to me?"

"He told me that I was to transfer my allegiance to you.. He hopes that you will change your mind and come to him on the *Star Queen*. He told me to protect you and guard you with my life, always remembering that you are my Queen and his wife. I have called to tell you this, and to await your further orders."

"I need time to think. I am safe here. Thank you for calling." Dazed and unbelieving, she turned off the viewphone. This was an entirely new development.

IT was a month later when she came in for a landing on the roof of a hotel in the world capitol. She had hardly settled in her room before she was at the viewphone. She dialed a number rapidly. With relief, she saw Ellen's face on the screen.

"Ellen, is Captain Mina there?"

"No, he isn't Peggy. He went down to Mr. Mallory's office this morning. Something to do with the *Star Queen*, I believe. He did not know you were coming."

"Will you tell him to come to see me as soon as he returns? It is urgent." Her voice caught on the edge of hysteria.

"What is the matter? You look troubled."

"I can't tell you now. Nobody can help me but Mina. He will tell you all about it after I talk to him. Only tell him to hurry, Ellen, please hurry!"

She hung up the viewphone on Ellen's protesting face, and tapped her fingers nervously on the table. She was thin, she noticed, and pale. She must get a grip on her nerves. It would never do to give way to her grief and hysteria now. Not when there was more than herself to consider. She carried within her the hope of two worlds.

With a sigh, she walked to her bed and threw her exhausted body across it. Outraged nature took its toll, and she drifted into an uneasy slumber. Her dreams were troubling. The baby she carried within her seemed to be a monster, a gilled monster with scales covering its tiny body. She stood alone, within a sea of curious faces, mocking her, laughing, pointing fingers of derision. All the faces merged into one, and it was Thane's face, leaning above her own.

With a muted cry, she wakened. Dusk had fallen, and in the semi-darkness she could see a figure leaning over her bed.

"Wake up, Peggy. You have been dreaming."

With relief, she recognized Mina's soft voice. She flung herself against him, and felt his strong arms in support.

He let her cry there on his shoulder, soothing her until her words became less chaotic. Then he wiped her eyes with his handkerchief, and smoothed away the film of perspiration on her brow.

"Now tell me what is the matter."

"I am going to have a baby. And Thane is gone, and I am so mixed up I don't know what to do."

Mina whistled softly. "The prince did not know. Of that I am sure."

"Of course not. I keep thinking of what that man said at Venusville. If the baby is amphibious, can it live on Earth?"

"I don't know. All the water on Venus contains an element that is missing on Earth. I don't know how to describe it, or duplicate it. We never thought of bringing it with us, for we

thought all water contained the same element. We call it aneet."

"The water on the *Sista*?"

"All gone, replaced with Earth water before we realized the difference. Adults can live in Earth water, but even we feel the lack of aneet."

"Then what can I do?"

"We will have to think about it. Obviously, you want to go to Thane."

"The *Star Queen* does not leave for six months yet. That will be too late."

"The Prince will be expecting you on the *Star Queen*."

"Yes, and if Mallory knows I am pregnant, he will never let me go. The results are too important to him."

"What else can you do but wait, and take the chance?"

"Thane left you the cruiser. Take me to Thane. You must!"

His face was incredulous. "To the moon, yes. To Venus, it would be virtually impossible!"

"Mina, you are sworn to the Prince and to me and to all our descendents as eternal servitor and liege man. Is this not true?"

"Yes, your Highness." He kissed his fingers, and raised them to his forehead in the ancient ritual of faithfulness.

"This is a birth without precedent. Can you let Thane's child be an experiment in a laboratory? Can you?"

Mina walked to the window, and stood looking over the city. "May the Gods of the Sea tell me what to do! The risk is so great! A mere man should not be asked to make such a decision."

"What would Thane want you to do?"

"I do not know!" Mina's voice was a cry. "He would not want me to risk your life or that of his child."

"Our lives are certainly in jeopardy if we remain here. If we die on Earth for lack of knowledge, can you face Thane when you step from the *Star Queen* alone?"

"There is Ellen. What can I do about Ellen?"

Peggy slumped back on her pillows. "I had forgotten Ellen. It was selfish of me I am afraid, Mina. I am a coward and afraid."

"No." Mina turned resolutely. He increased the brightness of the dim lamp over the corner desk. "It is I who have been selfish. Are there pencils here, and paper?"

Wordlessly, she nodded. He worked for a long time, then looked up and spoke to her sternly

"I want you to have no doubts of the seriousness of this situation. The cruiser is built for short trips, not like the *Star Queen* or the *Sista*. Fuel is no problem for the big ships. It will be a very great problem for us."

"How long will it take us to get there?"

"That will take some explaining. We will be forced to use the orbit which requires the least fuel expenditure. That is called, by your people, the Hohmann A orbit. That was the only orbit possible to your technology before Thane gave you our dyno engines and fuel. We must wait for our departure until a straight line can be drawn between Earth, at time of leaving, the Sun, and Venus at time of arrival."

"When will that be?"

"If you will come to our apartment tomorrow morning, I can give you the day and the hour. It is not too far distant. I will take you and your unborn child to Thane if it is at all possible."

She smiled, weakly. "All right, Captain Mina. God go with you."

He bowed at the door, and kissed his fingers in salute. She watched the door close behind him with a mixture of emotions. The curtains blew in the opened window, and she could see the stars shining dimly above the lighted city. Up there on the Evening Star

was Thane, and she had to get to him.

She drove her gyrobile alone to their apartment the next morning. She signalled the vidibell, waited for identification, and walked inside.

Ellen had been crying. Both of them showed the effects of a sleepless night. Ellen came to her, and put her arms around her gently. "I am glad about the baby, dear. No matter what we have to do, I am glad about the baby."

Peggy found herself inexplicably bursting into tears. "I am sorry, Ellen. I never felt so helpless in all my life."

"We will take you to Thane."

"We?" Incredulously, Peggy looked from one to the other, in alarm.

"Where Mina goes, I am going. You will need a woman. You are blazing a path for all of us who may marry Venusians."

"I am so glad you understand."

Mina broke in, raggedly. "Words are fine. Words are wonderful. But do either of you realize what one hundred and forty-six days in the cruiser will mean? That is almost five of your months. The three of us, in that cramped little ship, crowded and lonely. How can we care for a pregnant woman? It will be a fight for survival."

"Yes," Ellen broke in. "A fight for Peggy's survival, and her child's. Anything is better than that Thane's child die, strangling, in the hands of doctors incompetent to save its life."

"By the Gods of the Heaven and Sea, it's too much to ask of a man!" he roared, and after a helpless look at the two determined faces before him, pulled his hat over his ears and stormed from the room.

Peggy went back to work on the Satellite. Mina explained to Mallory that he was going home, that he wanted to take his wife to Venus. Mallory refused to hear of it until Ellen had been checked thoroughly by a physician, and upon his assurance that she was not with child, Mallory reluctantly gave his consent.

It was no easy job to smuggle Peggy into the cruiser, but Mina managed to do it. The staff on the Satellite had become used to his going back and forth to the little ship, provisioning it for the voyage. They were leaving at dawn. Mina made his last trip the night before, arranging it at the time of shift changing. The new shift did not realize that where three had gone, only two had returned. Peggy would not be missed before the morning.

She spent a lonely night on the small craft, every second lasting an hour. They barely had time to speak when Mina and Ellen came back on board just at dawn. Peggy buckled herself into the acceleration couch she had shared once before, with Thane. Ellen went into the control room, with Mina.

PEGGY'S mind was whirling, her body suffocating as she came out of blackout. Violently, she felt her body trying to surge upward, to find that she could not move. The acceleration was terrible, worse than anything she had ever experienced. This was no short thrust, but a grinding thing that would last, and last. She prayed for her baby, prayed for its cradle to hold fast under the pressure. She couldn't stand it. She couldn't! Gods of the Heavens! Gods of the Sea! Into thy keeping—Mercifully, she fainted.

Then Ellen's face was bending over her, Ellen's hands were releasing her. The awful ordeal of acceleration had ended.

The first weeks passed pleasantly enough, in anticipation and enjoyment of the newness of everything. The girls spent hours before the great observation screen, viewing the miracle of the heavens. The stars seemed different out here, where the thick atmosphere of Earth did not diffuse their glitter.

But eventually the view-screen lost its fascination. There were long lulls in the conversation, a tensing of nerves. The newness was gone. Earth was far behind them, she and her moon diminishing in their wake. Venus was far in the future. Between them lay days and days of existence. What were they to do in their cramped three rooms?

Man can build a perfect machine if he tries long enough. With every failure, he learns enough to make one more giant step toward perfection on his next attempt. Man could send ships to the planets, and even to the stars, if ships alone were required. It is the precious cargo of humanity they must carry that produces the unforseeable factor of the equation. Space was a new environment for man. He had learned to survive anywhere on his home worlds, but this was a new and hostile territory. The Venusians had done everything they could do to produce the necessities of life for any crew aboard the cruiser. They were given oxygen to breathe, a centrifuge to give them the false sensation of gravity. They were given a pressurized ship, pressurized suits if the carefully designed walls of the ship would be punctured by meteorites. They could live in creature comfort barring serious accident. Still there was no answer yet as to what would happen to the mind under the terrific pressure and the claustrophobia that would assail it.

There was no answer yet to what they would endure. Outside the silver walls there was no oxygen to breathe. Without the atmospheric pressure inside the ship, the very blood in their veins would boil. They rode through dangerous radiation from the unprotected sun, and the cosmic rays no man understood. Those very rays might be doing unmentionable things to their bodies, and they would never know it until it was too late. They lived with the constant danger of collision with meteors, and the strange nebulous storms that raged in space.

Somehow they reached the half-way point in their perilous journey. Then they had to live through twenty-four hours of renewed acceleration to give the necessary added impetus to the small craft. Mina himself was tense and haggard. The thrust must adhere to the most difficult calculations. He must use just so much of their precious power and no more. They must save enough to maneuver when they reached the satellite around Venus, yet use enough to keep them on their course to that planet.

They lived through it with the same bulldog determination. At the end, it seemed that they had failed. They had to cut down the oxygen content of the atmosphere a month away from Venus. Mina spent hours in the control room, earphones clamped over his ears, searching for the first faint radio signals from his homeland.

Three weeks from Venus, the planet loomed large and brilliant before them. Mina worked unceasingly with the radio. Finally, he knew that something was wrong. Ingenious Mina might be, but radio was one thing he did not understand. He tried, he experimented, but still the phones remained dead. They had come unscathed through an experience that tried their souls, only to crash through the atmosphere of Venus to an almost certain death

They entered the mixture of gases that swirled for hundreds of miles above the planet with mixed emotions. They knew now that the gases swung in a separate orbit of their own, held in their path by the same force that held the Satellite. Between them and the real atmosphere was a thin belt of airless space.

The outside view screens were milky and white. The small ship flew steadily onward through gases as poisonous to humans as the vacuum of space.

Mina had slanted the ship, so that they were flying through it obliquely. They were all there in the control room when the breakthrough came, as suddenly as it was unexpected.

"It is too incredibly lovely!" Peggy spoke in a hushed voice as they looked at the rose-green planet before them. The diffused light made it outstanding, a jewel in the setting of the clouds that swathed its upper atmosphere.

Mina's voice spoke tersely, clipped and decisive. "The braking rockets are going on, full force. I am going to turn the ship, after we circle the planet as many times as we can while the fuel lasts. It is only a matter of minutes now. Strap Peggy into the couch and give her the injection I have prepared. It will relax her and soften the shock of landing. Then come back here, Ellen, strap yourself in with me. We will undoubtedly crash. Relax as much as you can at the moment of impact. I will try to hit the water if I can do so."

Peggy allowed herself to be strapped on the soft couch, and smiled grimly at Ellen. "This is it," she said. "Good luck."

"We will make it." Ellen spoke with quiet assurance. Then Peggy felt the prick of the needle, and she sank instantly into a blackness deeper than she had ever known before.

Ellen walked rapidly back to the control room and strapped herself into the seat beside her husband. They were going down, now, caught in the gravitational field of Venus. The planet grew steadily larger, its small land areas growing in size by the second. The ship was growing warm, the friction of the atmosphere heating its metal hull to a rosy glow.

"Will the insulation hold? Mina, we are not slowing fast enough!"

"Hold on and hope, Ellen. Before we crash I want to thank you for coming."

"If we die, we die together."

They could see the green of a dense jungle beneath them now. The noise was terrific, a whining that seemed to be increasing instead of diminishing. Ellen opened her mouth to scream, and the pressure in her ears seemed to lessen. The chair upon which she sat was hot, almost unbearably so. She tried to move her hands, to find that she could not. Mercifully, she blacked out before the ship crashed into the swamp, sending mud and water high into the air. It settled amid hissing steam and boiling water, which began to seep into the ship through cracked and twisted surface plates. The three bodies lay, inert, crumpled in the broken ship.

ELLEN was the first to stir. She roused slowly, tasting the salt of blood on her lips. She turned her head slowly, shaking it a little to clear her vision. Mina was slumped over the controls, his head at an odd angle. With a smothered sob, she loosed the confining straps that held her immobile, and groped for his pulse. His heart beat was reassuringly steady, throbbing under her fingers. Steam was rising about them from the bubbling water covering the floor level of the ship. Mina groaned, and opened his eyes groggily.

His eyes sought hers and she saw the great relief within them. His first words, however, were not of her.

"Peggy! You should be with Peggy!"

Ellen gave a tremulous sigh. "Forgive me, Mina, but just this once you had to come first."

He was already fumbling at the straps that bound him. "Help me, Ellen. We must get to her. This place will be an inferno before it cools. How is your suit? Is it torn anywhere?"

She gave herself a quick examination, then shook her head dumbly. Mina looked carefully at his own, then took her hand.

"They should protect us for a sufficient time to get away. This is one time I certainly wish you were amphibs! We will have to take time for a boat."

As he spoke he stepped from their position in the higher control room into thigh-deep water, which was bubbling and boiling venomously. Closing her eyes, and with an involuntary shudder of horror, Ellen followed him.

"Don't stumble!" he warned her sharply, as he felt her steps falter. Together they felt their way along the deck, and into the cabin that held Peggy's helpless body. The water was rising steadily here, too. The soft sponge of the couch was inches above its seeping level. Peggy lay as one dead, the straps binding her body tightly. She was dripping wet with perspiration, and that was the only sign of life about the still form.

Mina left them there together while he struggled aft to inflate the life raft, and prayed that the door mechanism had not been injured. It was the work of a moment to inflate the raft and spray it with the special fluid that made its structure permanent. He was perspiring freely now, the insulation of his suit giving way to a burden it was not meant to bear.

Towing the raft, he waded back to Peggy's door. Ellen had gathered their few pitiful belongings into a bundle, and Peggy was free of her restraining straps. She rested quietly as though they were not marooned in this sea of boiling water, hissing as it rose steadily around them. Mina anchored the craft at the door, and walked through the deep fluid toward his wife. They lifted Peggy and placed her gently on the raft. Ellen settled a pillow beneath her head before Mina lifted her also, and placed her on the raft beside her friend.

"The mechanism that controls the doors is under water," he told her. "I will have to dive for it. Hold Peggy, and watch for the influx of water when the doors open. It may capsize you."

"I am not afraid," she answered, lifting her small chin bravely. Still she shuddered as she saw him lower the helmet of his space suit and disappear into the bubbling water.

Ellen steadied the helpless girl beside her and stared in fright at her strange surroundings. The heat was awful. She tried not to think of Mina down there, somewhere, in a suit meant only to insulate against the vacuum of space.

The doors moved at last, ever so slightly. That meant they were not fused with the white hot shell of the cruiser, as they had feared. Water began to froth through the opening, a miniature tidal wave. Ellen stretched herself prone beside Peggy and held her tightly. The raft danced and spun in the eddies and whirlpools The doors reached their full width before the water began to settle and subside. There was no sign of Mina.

Ellen felt her heart would burst from her breast in fear. She waited as long as she could bear it, and then she cried in a long piercing wail, "Mina! Where are you, Mina?"

His head broke water just beside their frail craft. He clambered carefully aboard, and sent the raft hurtling through the open doors. Ellen collapsed in his arms, and cried unashamed.

Behind them the cruiser settled deeper into the hissing muck, but they were safe. Safe on a tiny raft in the immensity of the Venusian swamps —but safe. The little motor on the raft drove them steadily away from their crippled ship, until at last it was lost from sight.

PEGGY stirred, drowsily. Something was wrong, somewhere. A little pain nagged at her back, forcing her over the edge of consciousness. Whimpering, she opened her eyes.

Above her head towered the gigantic tupa trees, trailing vines from their branches with leaves as large as her body. She was floating on some mystic sea, passing under the trees even as she watched them. Everything was so misty! She seemed to see through a filmy veil. With an effort, she rubbed her eyes, but the mist would not clear.

Ellen's face bent down into her line of vision. She reached for her hand, and found its strong grip.

"We made it, Peggy! We are safe on Venus."

The words did not penetrate at first. Then the memories came rushing back, and her eyes filled with happy tears. Mina's face came into focus beside Ellen's. These wonderful people had brought her through everything unscathed. The nagging pain returned, and she winced. Ellen was quick to notice it, and she asked her quickly, "Are you all right, Peggy?"

"I don't know." The girl spoke slowly. "I think it may be the baby. We have to find Thane, quick!"

Ellen glanced at her sharply. Then she looked at her husband with such a look of trust and belief that he choked The Gods of the Sea help him now!

Grimly, he began to disrobe himself, talking as he did so. "On Terra, Ellen, you could most easily find your way on the land. Here, I must try the sea. Much of our lives are spent under water. There will be signs and landmarks that I may be able to see or recognize. I can know a traveled waterway as easily as you would a well trampled path of Earth. Let the boat drift. You are in a gentle southerly current, and I can easily trace you. I am going for help. Remember that you may see many things that are strange to you—but there are no carnivorous animals on Venus that will attack man. Some of our wildlife are evil-tempered, but they will not hurt you. This is the region of the dyno minepools, where the dynoesium for fuel is mined. I will find an outpost somewhere. Just be brave and wait for me."

He stood upright on the small raft, stripped to a snowy white breech clout. His dark hair fell over his forehead in a tumbled mass, and the muscles rippled in his strong shoulders and in his massive thighs. He did not pause to bid them farewell, but left the boat in a clean arc, cutting the water with hardly a ripple. They could see his gills, opening and the release of oxygen from his air lungs in the rising bubbles in his wake. Their eyes followed him until he disappeared, a pale streak in the emerald green water.

The terrain turned menacing to the frightened girls with his departure. They huddled together in the center of the tiny boat, and looked about them with fearful eyes. This was a colorful world. The huge, quiet trees brooded over them, twined with golden yellow vines and large exotic blossoms. The water beneath them was crystal clear, and they could see the varied marine life between them and the sand bottom.

There were strange chirpings and rustlings in the trees. Lizard-like creatures played in their branches. Though their looks were reminiscent of the reptile, they did not cause the unconscious revulsion in the Terran mind. The girls guessed, rightly, that they were warm-blooded.

"Isn't it strange that there are no birds?" Ellen whispered, as though she were afraid to trust her voice. "Do you suppose this swamp is unusual, or are there no birds on the entire planet?"

"I don't know." Peggy's clothing was wet again with perspiration. "The pains are closer, Ellen. I wish Mina would hurry."

"Hold on, Peggy. You can't have it here"

They floated ever onward, one scene giving way to another. The mist seem-

ed to deepen and swirl about them. Peggy shivered. "If only the sun would shine."

"There is no sun," Ellen reminded her gently. "Not here."

It seemed hours since Mina had left them. Peggy had her eyes closed against the increasing pain, trying not to cry out. She felt Ellen shaking her shoulder, and she sat up with a start. The girl was white with fear, working her mouth though no sound would come from her terror-paralyzed throat.

"My God! What is that thing?" Peggy crouched in horror by the side of her friend, and gazed at the monster towering above them. It was a nightmare from Earth's prehistoric age. Eighty feet from nose to tail-tip, it towered another forty feet above them, half immersed in the water. The gigantic head, on a long and flexible neck, cocked to one side as it looked in amazement at the two puny creatures below it.

"It is a dinosaur — how horrible," Ellen moaned, as they stared hypnotized at the cavernous mouth. They could not tear their eyes from its paralyzing stare. The happenings of the next few moments seemed to encompass a lifetime

Like a shining savior, like the hero of a story-book, Mina's strong body hurtled out of the deep between them and the monster's approaching head. He gave a shout, and slapped it sharply on the under side of its foreleg, where the dark hide looked white and tender. The gruesome creature gave a look of infinite hurt and fear. Turning its great body awkwardly, it lumbered away through the trees, yelping in a voice that made the very leaves tremble

Mina climbed lithely over the side, laughing at the white-faced women. "It was only a pilon," he smiled. "He wanted to play."

"P-play?" Ellen could not talk. Mina turned his attention to Peggy, and indicated the thing he held in his hands.

"I found a small miner's settlement not too far from here. I borrowed this portable beam motor from the day caretaker. Just relax, and we'll have help for you in no time."

THE raft seemed to skim through the jungle. Mina knew with some sixth sense where every canal existed in the tangle, and Peggy thought the pains were much easier to bear, even though they were coming faster now. There was little time.

Earth swamps are still, turgid, stagnant. Here, though the trees grew thick on their hummocks of land, and the vines writhed and twisted about them, the water was as crystal clear as a spring. Peggy found herself almost enjoying the trip, since she knew help and sanctuary were at hand.

She saw the settlement long before they were upon it. It sat on a knoll, the first solid land she had seen, an island in the swamplands. There were no flying insects to annoy them. The air was clear and cool, though misty as in a dream. As they pulled into the landing dock, she saw the stooped figure of an old man, waiting for them on the shore

Mina spoke to him sharply, angered "Are you still standing here like a stupid dolt? Where is your Procuror? Have you made no preparations?"

"My lord, I swear to you I thought you were in jest. Women, here on Venus? And now I see them with my own eyes—these eyes I never thought would gaze upon the glorious face of a female. It is a wonderful day for Venus!"

"It will be a sad day for you if you do not follow my instructions! So much time wasted!" Mina groaned.

The old man opened his hands in dismay. "We are but a small settlement of miners, with but one Procuror of Life among us. We are allowed only

one birth every ten revolutions. Not a man alive on Venus, Procuror or not, has ever witnessed a human birth. What am I to do?"

Mina lifted Peggy into his arms and stepped from the raft with his precious burden. "Take me to your Birth Archive quickly, and to your Procuror. Have you no means of communication?"

"The nearest radio is twenty klegs distant. We have never felt need for any before."

"Then get me a messenger And hurry! There is no time to waste!"

They followed the old man through the maze of the settlement, until he stopped before the nicest building they had yet seen. It was small, but made of some hard-surfaced stone that shone rosy in the veiled light. They entered, to find themselves in a small room, cluttered with unfamiliar machinery.

The old man rapped sharply at another door, and it was opened by a tall man in a white uniform, with a golden insignia blazed across his breast. At sight of the visitors, his face turned ashen.

The old man saluted, kissing his trembling fingers. "Greetings, Procuror. These unfortunate travelers I found a few klegs from here. This is Captain Mina of His Highness' Personal Guard, his Earth wife, and this one nearing childbed is the wife of our Prince. I submit them to your care."

"But this is fantastic!" The Procuror was shaken.

Mina spoke sharply. "Fantastic or not, this is your queen. Prepare quarters for her! She must have a couch and preparations must be made for the coming ordeal!"

With an effort, the Procuror snapped into alertness. "Of course. These are my personal quarters. Bring her inside at once. My couch is at her disposal."

Mina lowered her upon the great round couch. Ellen was patting away the huge droplets of perspiration on her pale forehead. "It is getting worse," Peggy whispered, and caught Mina's hand in a grip that hurt. "Tell them to help me."

Mina turned with a look of exasperation to the men standing helplessly around her. "Procuror, if you do not know what to do, get your books of wisdom and find out. Give her something for the pain, soothe her, and prepare a tank for the child should it need one. Earthmen are not amphibious. The result of this birth is left to you and the Gods. Ellen will stay with you, and help you in any way she can. I must get word to the Prince. Do your duty." Mina saluted the Procuror, the first time Ellen had seen him salute anyone other than Thane or Peggy.

THE city of Varsnig, governmental center of the Venusian planet, drowsed in the after-zenith warmth. The shopkeepers were resting, their business at a standstill. The palace guards drowsed desultorily at their posts. It was a warm day, even for Varsnig

Still, in the Birth Archive, the Procurors were busy. Being allowed one hundred births a revolution, there were always embryos in various stages in the nursery tanks to be tended. Even the Procurors moved slowly in the stifling heat, and longed for the cool breeze of night to come. Athene, chief Procuror of Venus by virtue of his increased knowledge and travel, yawned and stretched his dignified arms high above his head. The very plants and buildings seemed to droop, and wilt, and wait for a breeze.

There was action in one place in Varsnig. In the larkpark behind the palace Thane was playing kino with his guards. They rode astride gahins; lizard-like swimming creatures with the dispositions of demons. The men were

exhausted, mentally and physically. There could be no lessening of their effort, for their hag-ridden Prince was quick to notice malingering. He had been driving them and himself to exhaustion since he had come home from the planet Earth. There was a demon within him, an unrest that nothing could quiet. He would not rest, and if there was no rest for the Prince, there was no rest for the men who loved him and served him so loyally.

Anas and Gren, grooms to the Prince's stable of gahins, crawled beneath the fronds of the decorative trees that lined the playpool. It was but little cooler there, for the heat of Venus came not from the direct sun, but from the world itself. They lay on their stomachs and watched the game without much interest. They chatted, boylike, of their future in the Prince's Guard. They nodded, but dared not sleep. Their ears were tender now from the unusual number of tweakings they had received at Thane's hands since his return. The exhausting game continued, men and beasts alike irritable and snapping.

In the outer offices of the Birth Archive, the radio-operator jumped to attention, adjusted his hearing apparatus, and motioned the others in the office to silence.

"Are you sure?" he snapped, his face taut. "Give me the exact location. Ninety klegs. You had better be right, or we will both answer for the consequences."

He left his post to one of the boys, and raced to the Chief Procuror's office. Athene glanced up with annoyance at the uncalled-for interruption. When he heard the message, however, he leaped to his feet and left the Archive rapidly. His robes of office streamed behind him in his wake as his bootheels hit the pavement with a rhythmic beat. The distance was too short to wait for his beamcar.

Anas and Gren scrambled from their hideaway under the trees when they saw the Procuror's racing figure. Never before had they seen him move faster than a stately walk. Now he ran like a boy, heading straight for the playpool.

"Do you suppose he has gone heat-wild?" Anas spoke without taking his eyes from Athene.

"Boy, look at him go! I can mento his excitement from here!" Gren whistled, admiringly, his eyes shining. Athene hit the water, uniform, robe, boots, notwithstanding.

"How is he going to breathe in all those clothes?" Gren spoke again. "I don't see how he can open his gills at all."

"It must be important."

The two boys watched in silence, as the tableau unfolded before them. Thane was angry at the interloper who dared interrupt his game. When he recognized the Procuror, his frown faded, and he listened with rising excitement to his friend's jumbled words. It was but a moment until Athene was pulled to the saddle behind him, and Thane sent the gahin through the water at beamcar speed. He threw the reins to his gaping grooms, and they heard only a few words as they tried to avoid the snapping teeth and plunging claws of their charge.

"Get the fastest beamship in Varsnig!" Thane roared. "And you, Athene, we will need you. By the Gods of the Sea, if this is a lie, I will blast the man who told it! Hurry, you fools, hurry!"

Thane paced the ramp before the beamcar furiously, threatening and cajoling by turns. Athene refused to leave without his Earth instruments, and the ship had to wait until he received they. At last they were seated, and the ship beamed off for the Seventh Dyno Mine. Thane hoverd over the pilot like his shadow, urging speed,

speed, speed. It was in reality a very short time before the green swamps, dotted with minepools, stretched before them. They settled easily onto the water, and Thane had the hatch open seconds after the landing.

Mina had sighted the ship with eyes strained from searching milky skies. Now he rushed to his Prince with outstretched arms, and embraced him like a child.

"Is she all right?" Thane's voice broke. "Where is she, Mina?"

"In the Birth Archive. Thank the Gods you brought Athene. He will know what to do."

The three figures rushed wordlessly through the village to the roseate building that sat aloof from its fellows They burst into it with no warning.

Ellen was sitting by the agonized woman, bathing her face and talking to her gently when the worst pains came. The Procuror stood by, keeping the temperature constant in the Birthing Tank, and watching the woman helplessly. A look of incredulous joy covered his face when he saw the figure of the Chief Procuror coming to his rescue. Athene paused in the doorway, regal in his stately robes. Even the Prince was ignored as he strode quickly across the room and knelt for a quick examination at the bedside.

Ellen moved aside without speaking to make way for the Prince. He stood looking down upon the wan face, so infinitely sweet and beautiful to him. Her mop of auburn hair was wet, and clung in tendrils to her temples. Her eyes were glazed with drugs, and the full lips he had kissed so rapturously were twisted with pain

"Peggy! By the Gods of the Sea, Peggy, you must be brave! I did not know! Believe me I did not know!"

"Thane!" The words came fretfully. "You went away, away — you went away. I have to find him, must find Thane—" her voice died in a low moan.

Athene touched his arm. "She does not know you now. You will have to leave the building. We cannot be disturbed."

Ellen had to lead him from the building like a child, and even then he was looking back at the frail figure on the couch. She gave him into Mina's keeping, and it was much later that he realized he had said no word to the girl who had risked her own life to bring Peggy here. Now he pushed his way through the curious miners who ringed the Birth Archive, and walked silently with his friend to the sloping swamp edge. They sat there, without words, staring into the cool green water.

MINA was waiting for Ellen when she finally came out into the roseate night. The sky was sapphire, tinged with rose and gold and green. The absence of a moon was not noticeable in the presence of so much unearthly beauty. Ellen caught her breath at its loveliness. "It is like—like fairyland, Mina."

The Captain embraced his wife, quietly. "Let me carry you to your bed now, for you must sleep, and rest. Poor Ellen. I have had little time for you on this journey."

"Everything is fine, darling." She laughed contentedly. "I do not know when I have felt so happy, or so at peace with myself. It has been a job well done."

Mina lifted the slender figure in his arms, and carried her as though she were a baby. She started to protest, then relaxed with her dark head on his shoulder and listened to the steady throb of his heart beneath her ear.

"Where is the Prince?" she asked.

"Pacing up and down before her door like one of your caged lions. There will be no sleep for him this night."

He entered the house that had been assigned to them, and let her slide gently to the floor. The room was half-

filled with a great couch, soft and inviting looking with a coverlet of softest rose. A huge tub, shaped like a gigantic sea shell, was filled with water still delicately steaming, for her bath. A diffused light, whose source she could not determine, bathed the room in radiance. It was a haven to the tired girl, and she smiled at her husband in appreciation. He helped her disrobe, silently, and bathed her like a child. She was asleep, exhausted, by the time her head touched the pillow. Mina smiled fondly at the little form before the lights dimmed to midnight black, and he stretched his long figure by her side.

WHEN Peggy opened her eyes the following morning, she found herself lying on a deep couch, her red curls framed by a turquoise pillow. Ellen was there, hovering over her like a mother hen flitting over a chick. The pain was gone, and deep drowsiness, coupled with a feeling of well-being, had taken its place.

"It is all over, isn't it, Ellen?"

"Yes. Everything is fine, just fine."

"My baby! Tell me about my baby!"

"Baby!" Ellen looked dazed. "Babies, you mean. Three of them! A son and two daughters. You had a litter, no less."

"Three babies!" Peggy whistled softly. "What a man is my prince of Venus!"

"Don't try to hog all the glory. Athene says, due to a peculiarity of the cells, all births will be multiple. That will be a blessing for Venus."

Peggy slept a shorter while, this time, and woke afresh, to the roar of a man's voice rattling the closed door of her room.

"I demand to see the Queen! Are you going to grant me admittance, or do I call my Personal Guard?"

A softer, placating voice was heard in answer. "Your pardon, Sire, but you are aware that no one may enter the chamber of a woman in childbed, save on the order of a Procuror of Life."

"Stupid laws! Who is your Commander? Your Prince, or some fool of a Procuror?"

"The Procuror, in this case, your Highness."

There followed some choice Venusian oaths, which Peggy's education had not included. Even if she could have understood them it would not have mattered, for a look of unbelievable joy was creeping over her face.

"I did not dream it! He is here! He is here!"

Ellen smiled. "Yes. He has been here since yesterday."

"What are you waiting for? Hurry and open the door!"

Ellen laughed aloud as she walked to the door and threw it open, to the consternation of the two guards who held a furious Thane at bay with crossed pikes.

"The Prince may enter now, by order of the Chief Procuror," she announced as solemnly as possible. The two guards dropped their pikes and stepped to one side, kissing their fingers and touching their foreheads in salute.

Ellen closed the door behind her, so they might be alone for their reunion. Thane's long legs carried him across the floor to kneel beside her couch. He looked at her for a long moment and she could see the new lines of worry and unhappiness that were etched upon his face. Then his arms were about her again, and his lips moved searchingly, tenderly, upon her face, kissing her softly between broken murmurs of endearment. Tears were wet on both their cheeks and salty upon their lips.

She remembered their first meeting, so different from this one, so many worlds away. She laughed in delight.

Pointing to herself, and then to Thane, she said in a deep voice, "Peggylane, woman. Prince Thane, man."

He looked at her with pride. "No, King Thane. I have an heir. The race of man lives again on Venus!"

"The babies! Oh, Thane, three of them! I want to see them—now, please."

He left her side reluctantly to find Athene. They returned shortly, two well wrapped bundles carefully held in the Procuror's arms. Peggy looked at the children with the holy look of dedication that is a mother's right, as they were placed beside her on the couch. She touched their cheeks, their downy heads, in humility.

"Aren't they sweet? Oh, Thane, the little darlings!"

"Princesses, both of them," he laughed in glee. "A Princess of Venus, at last."

A terrible fear swept suddenly over Peggy. She clutched for her husband's hand in alarm, and her voice trembled as she spoke.

"My son! Thane, what is wrong with our son?"

"Did you not know? He is in the Birthing Tank. How do you say it on your world? He is the only one to take after his old man!"

Tears of gladness came into her eyes. "Then it was true, after all. I did well and wisely to come here to you."

"Yes. You did wisely, poor little reluctant Eve."

"Our son shall be Prince Thane V. I think I shall call the girls Thania and Minette. Thania for you, and Minette for that wonderful, wonderful Mina. Do you know how blessed we are in having Ellen and Mina as our friends?"

"I know. And they shall be rewarded. Not only with honors and possessions, for they mean little, but with my eternal gratitude and undying affection."

"And with mine," Peggy said softly, as she drifted into sleep again, her husband's hand held tightly beneath her cheek.

THE END

Whatever your reaction to the story you have just read, the editors of OTHER WORLDS have derived great pleasure in presenting it to you. Perhaps you have read science fiction for many years, and are what is properly called a fan; in which case you will be well aware that this is the sort of thing that has endeared you to this type of fiction. If you are reading science fiction for the first time, then we feel sure that you've experienced a pleasant thrill over what you've read - - and we heartily invite you to be our guest in future issues; for we have many excellent stories on hand, perhaps even more pleasing than Evelyn Martin's award-winning novel. If you did like Evelyn, then it is only fair to inform you that the next issue (dated January and on sale November 1) will contain another story by the pride of Prichard, Alabama. It would be wise for you to reserve your future copies of OTHER WORLDS at your favorite newsstand, to make sure that he does not neglect to stock them for you. Best of all, of course, would be for you to subscribe, using the handy coupon printed elsewhere in this magazine. Whatever you do, we wish you many happy future hours reading OTHER WORLDS, whose editor is the oldest in experience in the whole field, having begun his career in 1926 as a writer for the very first science fiction magazine ever published.

MY HEAD IS TICKING

By Hal Annas

Most men, when kissed by a beautiful woman, find their hearts beating faster, but in this case, it was a ticking in the head that occurred; and it was in Morse Code!

I DON'T know just when I became a genius, but I do know I wasn't born one. I mention that fact because part of my genius is in handling figures and up until a few weeks ago my ability to calculate mathematically was reduced

by one-tenth whenever I sprained a finger.

When this ticking began in my head I told Alan Haynes about it. "Sounds like one of those office machines," I said.

"Has anybody slugged you with a brick?" he asked.

I studied over that, then shook my head, and it was then that his rather vacant eyes lit up and his face took on a sort of human look. "Wiggle your head again," he said.

I obliged and he leaned close and listened. "It's a clock," he said. Then: "No. It's stopped."

Haynes is a brainy sort, thirtyish, plump, ugly, and with his antics gives the impression of an unreformed idiot, but behind his tendency to lift girls' skirts with the crook of his cane, and slap nervous people on the back and yell "Fire," is an amazing ability to penetrate to the core of any puzzle.

He lit a cigarette and walked up and down, working on the problem, and I could feel the thought-waves as they washed about the room and lifted ashes out of the tray. Finally he looked at me in that peculiar intense way that makes his eyes cross, and said, "I've got it."

I backed off. You never know what's going to happen when an idea creeps up on him. He's just as likely to pass a beaker of ammonia under your nose as to offer you a drink and drop the glass before your hand closes on it.

"Stand still," he said.

I didn't like it, but I stood still. After all, I was his guest, had eaten his supper and hoped to borrow a twin sawbuck off him

Stepping close, he took my ears in his hands and swung my head in a rotating motion "I it's the way to start a clock," he sa.d. "Never shake it up and down. Give it a rolling motion. Ah! There she goes again slick as oil."

He didn't have to tell me because I knew I was ticking Being inside myself put me at a disadvantage. The ticking wasn't loud, and anyone on the outside noticing it might merely think he'd gone crazy. Inside, as I was, I could hear it plain and it was disturbing.

He pushed me into a chair at the table, drew the telephone close and called Bill Bright. "Is that you, Bill?" he said. "Well, listen, Bill, I've got this guy over here, Bill, and he's got a clock inside his head I'm not kidding, Bill, and it's no gag, Bill, so you'd better come on over "

We had a few drinks while waiting, and when Bill arrived, looking like an unembalmed cadaver, they took turns shaking my head and listening. They tried to figure out whether the ticking was keeping pace with their watches, but it was hard to listen to both at the same time and they finally accused me of putting in an off-beat just to confuse them.

They smoked cigarettes and walked up and down and Alan said, "It's a Swiss clock," and Bill said, "No, it's a Dutch clock." They argued about that, and I went on drinking, and finally Bill wanted to know, "How did it get in there?"

Alan stared at me and his eyes began to cross and I shook a bit, and not only my head, for they might take a notion, I thought, to make a firsthand investigation, and I always did get nervous around people who take things apart.

Bill shouldered Alan aside and said, "Maybe somebody else is putting in the off beat. Maybe it's some kind of code. Get a pencil and paper."

Alan got them and sat beside me and Bill called out the signals: "One two three pause one pause two pause three pause one two three . . . . "

"That doesn't make sense," Alan complained. "Tap him between the eyes with an ash tray."

"Wait a minute," Bill said. "Maybe the slow ones are meant for dashes. That would make it three dots three dashes three dots. That's *SOS* in wireless code."

"But wireless doesn't tick," Alan ar-

gued. "It goes *da-da-da* and *dit-dit-dit*. Tap him gently with a bottle, but make sure the bottle is empty."

"That's the way wireless sounds," Bill admitted. "But suppose it was a Morse sounder? It would go *ta-la-la tick-lick lick ta-la-la.*"

"The hell it would! The Morse code is different. The letter *S* is the same, but instead of three dashes the letter *O* in Morse is dot space dot."

"Yeah, but they could be using wireless code on a Morse sounder."

"Who's they?"

"Huh?"

They seemed stunned. Finally Alan said, "You mean, that isn't a clock inside him, but a Morse sounder?"

"That's what I figure."

"And they're using the wireless code?"

"Yeah."

Alan grabbed the telephone and called Ella Lauroo. "Is that you, Ella?" he said. "Well, listen, Ella, this guy has got a Morse sounder inside his head, Ella, and they're using wireless code, Ella, and we can't figure it out, and you being a ham, Ella, you gotta come over right away."

Ella brought her portable typewriter because, she explained, it might be a fast sender and would run under the table if she had to put it down with a pencil.

She's one of those half-pint girls, the cuddly kind, who would, if they were taller, be models or in a chorus line. Her eyes are big and smoky, her features bright and innocent, but her figure is that of a wanton, or what some men think a wanton's figure should be, and her platinum hair in no way changes this idea.

She placed the typewriter on the table, wound in a sheet of paper, pulled my head close against her ear and said, "All right, let's go."

I eased my chair still closer, breathed in the scent of her hair and enjoyed a long luxurious sigh.

"We have to start him," Alan explained, taking my ears in his hands.

She listened briefly and turned to Bill. "There's a lot of static, and in that ticking way it's hard to read, but I can make it out. The sender wants to know who's receiving. Give me something to tap on his head."

"A hammer?"

"No. That would be too clumsy. Alan, your cigarette lighter will do. I'll just tap out my initials and tell him to go ahead."

The lighter drummed on my head and suddenly the ticking became fast and furious, and Ella's hand flew over the keyboard of the typewriter.

With my head against her ear, and her hair in my eyes, I couldn't see what she was writing, and didn't much care, for I was doing what I'd wanted to do for a long time, and was thinking of the next move. I was working myself up to putting my arm across the back of her chair and letting my hand rest on her shoulder, but something about the ticking must have made me drowsy. The next time I knew anything, I was falling out of the chair.

She'd merely leaned forward to pull the paper out of the typewriter and my head had slipped off her shoulder. I caught myself as she stood up and began studying the writing. Alan and Bill moved close and looked over her shoulders.

Bill's face mirrored a goofy and impossible expression. "What do you make of it?" he said to Alan.

"It's crazy," Alan said. "Especially that part about a storm. The weather bureau forecast probably fair and warm with possible rain and snow. Not a word about a storm."

"It doesn't mean weather," Ella put in. "It says the whole planet is in the path of a cosmic storm - - like from the stars."

"That's it," Bill affirmed. "And whoever sent it says he's on a planet just

outside our orbit. That would be Mars." He turned and glared at me. "Are you by any chance making up all this?"

"Of course he isn't." Ella shook her head and patted me on the cheek. "He's too - - well, I mean, you have to have something - - " She tapped her own head with a small pink finger, and it made me feel good, for I'd long felt that she admired me and would come to my defense against any accusation.

"That's right," Bill said. "He hasn't - - We have to take it at face value. But what do we do now?"

"We have to notify the authorities," Alan said.

He got on the telephone and somebody referred him to somebody else and that somebody referred him again, and it went on like that for an hour, and then the ticking began again.

Ella put her arm around me and held my head close, and I heard her catch her breath and her respiration go up, and I knew then she loved me, for I was trembling.

"It says the storm will destroy the planet!" she exclaimed, snatching away. "The sender was interrupted earlier by what he describes as cosmic interference. He says our scientists can save the planet if they take measures in time. But now he's interrupted again, just when he was beginning to tell me what to do."

Bill and Alan stared at one another, their features running the gamut of expression from grotesque to vacuity, from vacuity to horror.

Ella herself was pale and short of breath. I reached out a hand to reassure her when, suddenly, she began rapping on my skull with her knuckles, raps inordinately heavy and which sounded like thunder inside my head.

And again she held me close and listened, and my intoxication with blissful emotions became such that, but for lack of an appreciative audience, I would have swooned.

With a final vigorous and possibly vicious rap she drew away. "No use," she said. "Not a tick; not a sound Silent as all emptiness. And I'm going home."

"You can't leave," Alan said. "I've started the machinery to round up a mob of physicists and astronomers for a meeting in the morning. We've got to have all the data to place in their hands. Now, suppose this guy begins ticking again, and you not here? Where would we be?"

"That's right," Bill said. "You can't leave, Ella."

"Have I got to sit here with his - - his head on my shoulder all night?"

Both Bill and Alan shrugged. "He isn't so bad," Alan volunteered. "He can't help it if his features are blank and his eyes glazed and he looks like something out of a nightmare. Hitch up your girdle, take in on your bra and get a grip on your courage. Think of the noble sacrifices made by other women. Thousands of them even live with men almost as ghastly as that. Surely you can make the sacrifice to preserve the planet and mankind."

"That's right," Bill added. "Even horror is preferable to death."

Ella looked at me for a long moment, finally smiled. "He's so ugly he's cute. It would be comical if it wasn't tragic. I need a drink."

"There's a store nearby," Bill said. "I'll get a supply."

Alan stayed on the telephone mostly while Bill was gone, and Ella watched me out of one big smoky eye and opened the other whenever she took a notion to pound on my head. It finally became irritating. Everytime I would doze I would be waked by that vigorous drumming, and everytime I got excited enough by her charms to want to stay awake she would push me away.

Her strange actions were, of course, defensive measures. No proud girl can endure having the object of her passion

fall asleep on her. On the other hand, she must do something to prevent herself from smothering him with kisses and making violent love to him when he is awake, and this measure often takes the form of a gentle push, made a trifle vicious by the heat of the emotion consuming her.

In this manner the night passed, my head on her shoulder one minute, her knuckles pounding on my skull the next, and then her kicking and slugging and pushing me away. It left us both a trifle irritable next morning, and we had to drink our breakfast rather than eat, which was the final proof of our love.

Bill and Alan joined us out of sympathy.

Because of our liquid breakfast we were fairly lush when the physicists and astronomers, led by that giant intellect Albert Magnusson, filed in at ten o'clock. After the introductions Magnusson turned to his conferees:

"We have come here at the behest of a man who is best known for the scope of his thinking. The scope is so broad it is exceedingly thin, but the nature of his claim is such that we cannot afford to bypass the opportunity for an investigation. Gentlemen, Mr. Alan Haynes claims that he and those with him here are in communication with intelligent life on the planet Mars."

There was a brief moment of murmuring and stirring.

"Not only that," Bill put in, raising his voice. "We've received a message telling us the earth is in the path of a cosmic storm which will destroy it." He handed Ella's typing to the great man.

After a brief study and consultation with the others, Magnusson said, "This mentions a planet, but doesn't say which planet. Your inference that it is earth is logical but admissible of further investigation. I suggest that you demonstrate your ability to communicate with Mars, or any planet aside from our own, and see what added information can be gained."

Alan looked at Ella, then me. "Go ahead," he suggested. "Show them."

After a moment of thought, which brought tired lines to her features, Ella said, "We haven't been in contact with Mars since last night. I'll try again, but I know we won't get anywhere. We just have to wait until the sender comes in."

She rapped on my head with her knuckles, with the lighter and finally with a book. Alan and Bill took turns rolling my head round and around by the ears.

"Something's stuck," Bill offered. "Let's turn him upside down and shake it loose."

I would have rebelled but for the fact I was eager to get the ticking going so I could put my head on Ella's shoulder.

Bill took one leg and Alan the other and tilted me head down and, being a bit unsteady, bounced my head against the floor, while the great men looked on in solemn and dignified deliberation.

When they tired of this they stood me upright again, and Ella came close, lifted a hand to my shoulder, and begged, "Please begin ticking. I can't stand this much longer."

Her nearness, her warmth, the scent of her hair, and her soft and earnest appeal overwhelmed me. I had reached the point where I could no longer restrain the demand for expression. I flung my arms about her and planted my lips firmly on hers.

She squirmed and kicked and finally bit my lip. I drew back and she turned to the others and squealed, "He's ticking again. Listen!"

The great men came close and cupped their hands behind their ears. One of them remarked, "Highly interesting," and another added, "It's known that each cell in the body has a positive and negative pole. It is therefore not impossible that the current, converging on

a specific point, would actuate the cells in such a manner as to make the sound to which we are listening."

"Not impossible?" Bill scoffed. "You hear it, don't you?"

"I was alluding to cause and effect," the great man went on. "I was about to say that it now becomes apparent that this gentleman's charge had become somewhat depleted and - - "

"You mean, his battery had run down?" Alan interpreted.

"The analogy will serve. It is further apparent that upon contact of his osculatory organs with the reciprocative organs in possession of Miss Lauroo he became stimulated or recharged."

"You mean, she primed him?" Bill put in. "And now he's running on his own?"

"That expresses it in a rather primitive way. And while interesting, the problem is rather out of our field. It would be my suggestion that you have the gentleman examined by eminent doctors with the object in mind of permitting competent surgeons to explore thoroughly his cellular structural combinations, which may lead to an understanding of whether every man ticks, possibly on a subsonic level, when his electrical potential is brought to a sharp focus through stimulatory contact with a member of the opposite sex.

"It may be," he went on, "that the ticking responds only to a specific member, let us say, the perfect mate, and that evolution is preparing mankind for an audible ticking age in which the dilemma of the female in chosing a fitting spouse would be immediately solved on the basis of whether or not the male in question made known his qualifications by a clocklike sound whenever she applied her lips to his with significant intensity.

"An interesting study," he added, "but hardly one for a body of theoretical physicists and astronomers. That, it seems, should conclude our investigation and observations, unless, of course, others present wish to examine further into the matter."

Alan and Bill looked limp and washed out. Ella had been pounding on my head for the past thirty seconds without getting the response she wanted

Magnusson said, "May I borrow the message you informed me had come from Mars? I am interested in determining why you think it came from another planet."

"Keep it," Alan said in a sort of hopeless way, and they filed out.

They had been gone maybe five minutes when the off-beat came in with a furious desperation that almost split my skull. Ella went into action at the typewriter in a way that seemed inspired. She was receiving again, and when I tried to lift my head off her shoulder, Alan unfastened my necktie and looped it around her neck and mine.

Bill ran out to try to overtake the scientists.

The ticking stopped eventually and I got a look at what Ella had typed. It didn't make sense. It had in it such things as "Mass defect times the velocity of light squared," and something about nuclei adhesion quanta versus gravitational repulsion in the atom.

I couldn't make heads or tails of it, but near the end was something easier:

"Learned your language and many other things from your broadcasts which reach us clearly, but owing to our lack of high power have been unable to exchange intelligence with your planet. We have no rivers, no coal, and very little combustibles of any nature. Our power is generated by windmills, but our atmosphere is thin and turns them slowly, and all but the most minute quantity of power is required to keep us warm in the polar regions, the only habitable parts of our planet . . . . "

The message broke off at that point and jumped to this: "We learned that certain molecular structures functioned

as receivers and were of extreme sensitivity, and we assume you are receiving through one of these. Without synchronization it is impossible to transmit a broad range of sounds. Your own simple codes solved this for us. And by cooperation we may save the planet."

The message ended there. We were just about to comment when Bill returned.

"Caught Magnusson," Bill said, "but he wouldn't come back. Said that if anything convincing was received to call him at his home and his assistant would take down the gist of it."

"A run-around," Alan snorted. "Here we are on a planet about to be destroyed, in communication with a higher order of intelligence that might save us, and we can't even get anybody to listen."

"Call somebody connected with the government," Ella suggested.

"What do you think those guys are connected with?" Alan said bitterly. "That's the hell of it! We've shot our last bolt."

"Then we've got to do something ourselves," Ella persisted.

I was of this opinion myself, and a good way to begin, it seemed to me, was with a kiss. I was about to fling my arms around Ella when Alan said:

"I might as well call Magnusson and give him the data. It won't do any good, but we can't just sit here."

"No," I said. "If she'll just stop moving around - - "

"Be quiet," Bill interrupted. "We can't hear the ticking when you're talking." He pushed me into a chair.

"We've got to do something," Ella repeated. "I can't stand this."

"Call a couple newspapers," Bill suggested.

Alan shook his head. "They'd check with the scientists and label the whole thing a hoax."

Bill nodded solemnly. "And even if they published it as fact, there'd be panic and riots."

"But we've got to do something," Ella insisted. "We can't just wait for the world to be destroyed when we've got our fingers on the thing that would save us."

Her fingers were twining and retwining about one another, but she was referring to me. A girl in love can't get her mind on anything but the man in question, and will allude to her love in a thousand ways

And there is the law of opposites which goes into effect whenever she begins swearing. She is simply chosing delicate and tender antonyms, knowing you'll understand. In her colorful and feminine way, Ella damned me for not ticking. She called me a dumb ox, an insipid ass, an inveterate moron, a chronic mental invalid, a mindless blob, a collection of bones and blubber that wouldn't tick when ticking was required. All of which under the law of opposites, showed how tenderly she adored me.

I felt sorry for her. Her overwhelming passion kept her swearing for five minutes in a way that, if printed, would set the page afire. Her love was magnificent, transcendent, expressed more ardently than Cleo might have mentioned her own pallid affections for Anthony, and under the pressure of the law of opposites demonstrated in the way she kicked me, slugged me, slapped me, and yanked my head around, trying to make me tick

"I'm going to get drunk," Alan said

"No," Bill snapped. "Not another drop until we've done something. We have to keep on trying."

"But I'm at the end of my rope," Alan argued. "What can we do?"

"Get in touch with the president," Ella offered. "If we can convince him we'll have the resources of the government behind us."

Alan snatched the telephone and tried to put through a call to the White House. Somebody demanded that he state his business and identity, which he did, and promised to refer the matter up the

line.

He called the F.B.I. and somebody there promised to investigate all stray storms and apprehend the guilty party or parties.

He finally called the switchboard operator and said, "Is that you, honey? Well, listen, honey, this is Alan, honey, and I'm calling to tell you goodbye, honey, because they're about to ring the curtain down, honey . . . . "

The talk went on for several minutes and said the same thing, substantially, twenty-seven times. At the end of it, after he'd told her, with tears in his eyes, that his last thoughts would be of her, he asked her to ring Magnusson's home.

Whoever answered was excited, and talked so loud that Alan had to take the receiver away from his ear, and we could all plainly hear what was said.

"Yes," the voice shouted, "Mr. Magnusson came in and went immediately to his study. He came out soon with a paper in his hand. He looked at me and gasped, 'Great Caesar's ghost,' then ran out of the house. That was quite a while ago. He's never acted this way before and I don't know what to do. Can you suggest anything?"

"I can't," Alan said and hung up.

"What now?" Bill wanted to know.

"Nothing much," Alan said. "Magnusson's lost his mind. That's all. And he was our last hope."

They brooded and forgot to order lunch. Ella got into another swearing mood and my love soared like a balloon. The full realization of my genuis came then Evolution had for millennia striven toward an age of ticking. I was the first successful working model. In history I would live as the herald, the first to light a candle in an age of darkness. All men would envy me; all women would envy Ella whose torrid passion would be credited as the inspiration. In these mammoth thoughts, so profound and complicated that no other man alive could wield them through his mind with even approximate facility, I almost fell asleep

Magnusson burst in on us. He said, "Greater Caesar's ghost, get busy! Don't sit there like clucks. The whole thing is clear now. I had a paper on my desk reporting Farley's discovery of a cosmic hotspot headed toward the solar system, and this confirms it." He waved the paper on which Ella had typed. "Get busy," he shouted

Everybody jumped. Bill took a drink. Ella collapsed into a chair.

"Get busy doing what?" Alan demanded.

"Get in communication with Mars," Magnusson roared. "Time may be running out. But we can avert this thing if we work fast."

Bill took one of my ears and Alan the other and I thought they were going to tear my head off my shoulders.

"Not that," Magnusson snorted "Miss Lauroo, kiss him, and for godsake put some fire in it."

At first she seemed puzzled, then, with a malicious gleam in her big eyes, she advanced on me. I confess I was frightened. The way she kissed me made my hair stand on end, and suddenly I was ticking so loud that it rattled the windows.

"That's the stuff," Magnusson said encouragingly. "Keep on and put more enthusiasm into it. Charge him up just short of blowing a fuse."

She did. I swooned. Bill and Alan caught me and placed me on the couch Then she went to work in earnest. The whole cosmos spun blissfully and great thunderclaps of ticking hammered inside my head.

"That's enough," Magnusson warned, eyeing Ella with more than scientific interest. "He's gasping for breath. And you, Miss Lauroo, are an electrical phenomenon. I would personally like to make a thorough investigation of your cellular structure. But to the point: Get in communication with Mars."

She rapped on my head.

"Harder," Magnusson advised. "I'm inclined to believe the signal impulses respond to his feeling, and as you can plainly see he's almost unconscious. You will have to pound on his skull."

She did. I saw stars. Mars and other planets and flashes of lightning.

"Please, Miss Lauroo," Magnusson cautioned, "don't knock him unconscious. He may have a concussion already. Ease up and transmit what I tell you: Mass defect times the square of the velocity of light - - Hold on. Don't want any mistakes. I'll write it out."

That's when I discovered my full genius for handling figures. As I lay there in a semi-conscious state, the formula throbbed through my head without a solitary mistake. Only genius is perfect or near perfect.

She pounded for what seemed hours, pausing only when those explosive tickings came back with questions or comments. And as she did so, Magnusson explained: "We're not transmitting electrical energy. It moves at the velocity of light and there would be a time lag between here and Mars. The response is instantaneous, in zero time, which means a new form of energy in the ticking age."

"Are you going to be able to save the world?" Alan demanded.

"The world?" Magnusson registered astonishment. "I doubt it. Men and women have been trying since the beginning. It's out of my field. We are now trying to save the life on Mars from a cosmic storm."

"Will we succeed?" Ella asked quickly.

"I think so," Magnusson said. "Our calculations about the storm differed from theirs. It will not be as intense as they anticipate. I've given them new formulas worked out by Farley and me which will enable them to minimize their losses by appropriate measures.

"The significant thing," he went on, "is the fact that a new age has dawned. We are in communication with intelligent life beyond our planet. It is our duty to maintain that communication." He looked at me. "You're an unusual specimen," he added.

"Does that mean," I asked, "that I'm something special like a genius?"

"Something different, yes." He nodded. "It may be that in your head is a series of unusual vacuums, similar to vacuum tubes."

"Ella," I said, "will you marry me?"

"Yes," she smiled. "I love to hear you tick."

And as she put her arms about me and kissed me, and then really went to work, and as I ticked louder and louder, as the storm of emotions in my body spun the universe dizzily, as I swooned ecstatically toward unconsciousness, I heard Alan say to Bill, "It's fine now. But you know how women are. Soon she'll expect chimes and bells and maybe even a concert."

THESE BACK ISSUES ARE STILL AVAILABLE

OTHER WORLDS:
1952 January, April, June, July, August, October, November, December
1953 January, February, March, April, May, July
1955 July, September, November
1956 February, April, June, September

UNIVERSE:
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SCIENCE STORIES:
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(10c each, or see Page 96)

The DIMENSIONAL WASP

By Barry Miller

The wasp has a horrid habit of laying its eggs in a living host, which then serves as food. But this wasp was from out of the fourth dimension!

I TWISTED. I turned. I wriggled. Mentally I cursed this sudden onslaught of insomnia. Sleep was now so difficult; it had never been as this previously. I squirmed around beneath the covers seeking a compromise with the wrinkles in the sheets. Lois, at my side, protested sleepily, "Can't you calm even a *little*, Calvin? What is it that so disturbs you?"

"Wish I knew, darling," I mumbled inadequately, making a pathetic effort to relax. Dear Lois had asked a very good question; yes, sir, worthy of $64,000. Trouble was I just didn't know. What was gnawing away at me could only be compared to an uneasy premonition, like the sense of *loomings* Ishmael experiences in the beginning of *Moby Dick*.

"Well, Cal," Lois lilted, "I certainly hope it's not your conscience!" She was looking at me now, and in the light of the aged moon shimmering through our open bedroom windows, I couldn't help noticing her beauty. Naiad-lovely Lois, my little moon-nymph Lois; I was ever incredulous of the fact she was my wife and had been so for two years. She gave me a lazy smile which was aureoled by hair of dusk and gold, phosphored by the moonlight. That impossibly beautiful corona of hers stirred in the subtle breeze from the windows; wrinkling her nose at me, Lois held out her honey-textured arms. Resistless Lois! I kissed her.

She sighed, her breath mingling with mine. "At least, Cal, it's not another woman."

"That'd be impossible, darling."

"Thanks, beloved." She snuggled beside me and was slumbering in minutes. I regarded her sleeping form with a mild, infantile envy, and resigned myself to a night of wakefulness. The intimations of *loomings* seemed stronger somewhy.

Slowly the wan old moon perished in the ocean to the west; a gradual darkness crept silently across the land and into my room. It was a strangely liquid blackness, and I attributed it to my displaced frame of mind. How mighty was my unease now! I found myself enjoying the eerie mood . . . we all get them at times.

Sudden fear lanced through my bowels

A golden light was glowing on the wall . . . and out of it came a wave of sheer terror

and chest. On the wall . . . *inside the wall* . . . was a Light. Golden and frigid was its radiance, bright yet not bright. I was chained by my apprehension and I could only stare at the Golden Light.

Cold-glowing sphere of gold, orange-sized, somehow imbedded in the wall . . . my thoughts rampaged wildly with speculations and terrors. But that was nothing compared to my consternation when the Light commenced a slow but terribly inexorable crawl up through the wall toward the nighted ceiling.

I have no idea why I did not waken Lois.

I was ensnared in the viscosity so hampering which attends the most disturbing nightmares. And then it occured to me that perhaps I *was* having a nightmare; I looked at the slow-crawling Golden Light and shuddered. So menacing was its mien! But does not illogical menace manifest itself in all fiend-dreams?

I made a violent effort to dispel the dream and was inexpressibly thankful for the oblivion of deep sleep.

I woke up the next day to the appetite-rousing odor of the luxurious breakfast Lois was cooking. Washed and shaved and dressed up in what I jokingly referred to as my "Author's Uniform" - - slacks, moccasins, and sport-shirt - - I met Lois in the kitchen of our spacious home. It was a perfect ranch-style house in one of the suburban development projects only a few miles out from San Francisco; the view of the ocean we had was superb. We ate in something of a silence; we almost never seemed to have much to say to each other, preferring the stronger *rapport* of shared silence. The nightmare of the dead night was wholly forgotten.

It took me until noon to build up enough courage to enter my *sanctum sanctorum* and renew my assault on the troublesome spot in Chapter Eighteen of my love-labor, A VINE ON VESUVIUS. After some two hours of quiet tumult broken only by sporadic typewriter clacking, I got over the hump and turned out a smooth flow of words . . . which I hoped would get me 3 cents apiece. At six that evening, I quit my writing for the day only to learn I was

to have supper with the Dvoraks. Lois' insistance shattered my adamance.

So I endured several monotonous hours of bridge and Tessie Dvorak's positively enervating chatter. Even impeccable Lois looked a little frayed, and I experienced that periodic wonderment of mine: *just how does good old Bill Dvorak inure himself to Tessie's gossip?*

Back at home, I paid my daily homage to the tyrant of the household . . . Muffin, my cat. Just as I was about to relax between the crisp covers, he started mewing and Lois urged me to put him out. It may have been only an illusion fostered by my weariness . . but Muffin appeared unusually nervous when I came across him, because he was usually revoltingly (but lovably) lethargic.

Back in bed I made vain efforts to woo Morpheus, inhaling the fairy-fragrance of Lois' perfume as a hypnotic. After a while I got disgusted with my puny labors and sighed as I contemplated another insomniac night. Just *what* was wrong with me? Doc Jamieson might help, I reassured myself.

Beyond the windows the sickly sickle moon was engulfed in the Pacific. A thrumming sub-perceptive tension pervaded the house. The same liquid night of last night washed in a dusk-tide across the land, the sea, and my room. It was with a start that I found I was trembling.

Tenuous flickerings taunted the edges of my vision. And with unexpected instantaneousness, the Golden Light swelled into existence *inside* the wall. It was as big as a basketball now, and its hazy illumination was, if anything, colder. Across its entire spherical surface baby nebulosities wafted and shimmied, giving it a mist-appearance. And my fear was a concussion in my brain.

This was no hallucination!

It was unrelenting reality!

Lois, I tried to cry. Tried . . . but for some terrible reason, I could not. Unseen fluid resistance hampered my every motion and smothered all sounds in my throat. I watched the icy Light fearfully.

It was climbing up inside the wall. It shone through even the picture hung there. By unhurried gradations it approached the ceiling. Then it leisurely dimmed and it was as if it had never been.

I could move and I could speak.

But I was afraid to waken Lois.

She might think me crazy.

I was sweating and miserable; that I managed to fall asleep is a major miracle.

The next day I recalled the Golden Light all too lucidly. And I still couldn't bring myself to tell Lois of it. I was afraid it would put her in a fluster, and although Lois in a fluster is quite alluring, I nevertheless didn't want her fussing and worrying over me. But as I was obviously in no frame of mind to work on my novel, I felt a little at a loss for something to do . . . when I realized I needed a confidant and needed one badly.

So I went over to see Bill Dvorak, a Brother-Writer. Good old Bill and his escapist fancies were just what I needed . . . I had no doubt that he'd hand me his latest manuscript and eagerly await my reactions when I returned from whatever distant sun his yarn bore me off to. However incredible his concepts, Bill was one damn fine writer.

Bill was glad to see me; Tessie was out visiting, so we had the house to ourselves. Over beers and cigarettes, Bill expounded - - in his quick, appealingly energetic way - - on his newest tale to me. His eyes danced as he rattled off concept after concept, and even though I was left floundering in my half-hearted attempt to follow his quick logic, he kept on explaining, " . . . so this quadrihyperspace reacts *thus* on the C-exceeding ship . . . dimensional equilibrium inverted and reversed . . . resultantly there comes an infinite-warp along a *n* time-space fabric . . . planet dis-

solved . . . mass-imbalance upsets galaxy . . . terrific, huh?"

"Terrific," I agreed, and in the next minute I was cussing the fact that Bill was such an uncomfortably observant fellow. Right off the bat he told me:

"Hell, Cal, come off it . . . what's twisting your brains? Mentally you've been roaming around God knows what continuums . . . you haven't had any trouble with Lois, I hope . . . ?"

I surrendered to the query in his sharp brown eyes, "No, it's not Lois," I murmured. "To be honest, I have no idea *what* it is that's bothering me."

"Subconscious disturbance?" Bill asked sympathetically.

"Wish it were," I muttered. "Not as simple as that, unfortunately. Do me a favor, Bill, and shelve this subject."

And it was my mistake to say that. I'd forgotten about how persausive Bill could be with his swift movements and alert eyes. In less than five minutes I had poured out the whole tale of the Golden Light and Bill took it without a blink. He told me with level voice: "I'll not go blasting off on a tangent, Cal, and claim that we have a Visitor from Outer Space or anything. I'll confine my imagination and say that, although I've an infinity of speculations, I'm as perplexed as you."

I took a pull at my beer and thought how heartening Bill always was. No question as to my sanity. I was immensely relieved and told him so. He gave that modest shrug of his and said seriously, "We should do something about this."

"Perhaps," I mumbled. "Any propositions as to what?"

"Let me think . . . hell, yes! Come on, Cal - - you'n me are going downtown."

"To pick pansies?"

He glanced at me. "No - - to see a friend of mine."

"Who?" I asked with birthing interest.

"Lambert Andrews. You don't know him, Cal . . . he's a pal of mine from a real way back. He practices psychiatry in the of . . . "

"Psychiatry! So I'm batty . . . "

Firmer were Bill's tones: " . . . in the office building on Sutter Street near Powell over in the city - - you know the place, the skyscraper a block up from Union Square. But he's also an enthusiastic student of all forms of necromancy and demonology."

"Oh," I gasped, my indignation deflated.

"Want to go, Cal?"

"Sure!"

So we went.

To state merely that Lambert Andrews was a man of arresting features and attitude would be doing him a gross injustice. In every respect but one, he was the supreme evolution of the black-haired, grey-templed Man of Distinction you see in the whisky ads. The difference was embodied in his eyes - - they caught me, charmed me, and summed me up all at once. I knew then that Lambert Andrews was a man of fathomless intellect and understanding. He absently smoothed his rich black mustache while Bill introduced me, and when he rose to shake my offered hand, he exerted confident pressure. His superbly deep and modulated voice was pleasant in my ears as he said, "My pleasure to meet you, Mr. Steinman."

"My pleasure equally, Mr. Andrews," I replied. Andrews gave me a moment of thoughtful regard, then laughed. "Mr. Andrews? Mr. Steinman? From the expression on Bill's face, I suspect you and I will get to know one another well. So let's make things easygoing. Call me Roger - - that's my middle name - - and I'll call you . . . ?"

"Cal or Calvin."

"Cal. Very well, Cal, and would you like a drink?"

"Thanks, Roger, if it isn't too much bother . . . "

"Not at all!" Andrews produced whis-

ky and soda from a miniature bar in one cabinet of his tastefully embellished office. His was a huge talent for making a person feel settled - - I hadn't been with him ten minutes, yet I felt toward him as if he were a college buddy. His talent, I thought, was probably his best asset when he practiced psychiatry.

Once we'd made ourselves comfortable with drinks and smokes, Andrews mentioned, "Much can be read into the expression on a human face if one is skilled. From what I read into Bill's, I decided to cancel all my appointments for today. Please excuse me while I inform my secretary."

As Andrews spoke to his receptionist over the intercom, I shot a look at Bill who returned it with a very significant glance. I nodded; no doubt about it, Lambert Andrews was a very decent sort. Flicking off the intercom, Andrews asked Bill, "Well, friend, unburden yourself! You wouldn't be here today if you didn't have one - - right?"

Bill couldn't restrain a grin. "In a way, Roger. Cal, here, is my burden."

Andrew's eyes shifted to mine. "You would like to make appointments with me? Or is your trouble other than psychosomatic?"

"I sincerely *hope* it's not psychosomatic," I breathed. And Bill took over, relating to Andrews my experiences with the Golden Light.

When Bill concluded, Andrews became very meditative. "I accept your word for it that Cal isn't having hallucinations, Bill. From my own observation of him, brief as it has been, I would say that his suffering from illusions is extremely improbable. But this leaves us with two quite narrow solutions . . . either this Golden Light is some form of optical illusion - - reflected moonlight, perhaps . . . "

"The moon had set both times before it appeared," I put in.

Andrews put his elbows on the smooth surface of his desk, folded his hands, and rested his chin on them. "You think then it is supernatural?"

"Frankly, I'm not sure how to look at it."

"Your wife has never seen it?"

"She was asleep both times."

Andrews sighed. "I am powerfully inclined to consider this Light as actually being some form of supernatural phenomenon. Yet, without additional data, I discover myself to be at a mental impasse. The Light could easily be some odd but perfectly explainable natural quirk."

"Such as?" I inquired.

"You know that inversion layers in the atmosphere can sometimes become reflecting surfaces and have been blamed for some of the 'flying saucer' frights?" At my nod, Andrews continued, "This Golden Light could - - just barely could - - be a concentrated beam of moonlight reflected through your bedroom windows by a high inversion layer . . . the moon had just set at *ground level* on both occasions which means it was still shining higher up. Right?"

"Right," I confirmed.

"So we have one possible explanation . . . but I do not think it to be correct. The chances are Lord knows how many trillions against to one for its occuring even *once* . . . but it has happened to you *twice in a row* . . . increasing the negative probabilities by a factor of quadrillions!"

"What can you conclude?"

Andrews spread his palms. "It might be an elaborate joke being played on you . . . do you think it at all probable?"

I registered firm negation.

"Then," Andrews concluded, "it must necessarily be supernatural."

"There *is* such stuff?" I queried.

"Certainly there is, Cal. You must surely perceive that Man, for all his accumulation of knowledge, nevertheless knows so infinitesimal a fraction of the Universe's total wisdom that he might

as well know nothing. This makes 'Supernatural' a relative term.

"Knowing any history at all, it should be no secret to you that the Supernatural was everywhere among primitive cultures. They had nymphs in trees, gods who herded the clouds and unleashed cataclysms if not appeased. Over the millennia, we solved many of the mysteries veiling celluar growth, the weather, and subterranean natural violences. But *many* is a very pitiful term indeed compared with *Cosmos*. What forces and Laws have we yet to discover? We, who might as well say that little demons create gravity because we have no better explanation?"

He had a point, all right. "Accepting the supernormal as forces perfectly natural but beyond Man's comprehension," I said, "what then should I do about this Golden Light?"

Andrews shrugged. "I wish I could tell you, but I am no more able to define the correct course of action than you. At least, you can make a passive effort to find out the factors governing the Light. Make an experiment - - sleep in a hotel tonight. If the Golden Light doesn't appear, you will know at least that it has either stopped bothering you or that it is confined to your house. Then it's up to you to either ignore it . . . if that's at all possible . . . or move."

I finished off my highball and nodded. "Logical, Roger. May I borrow your phone so I can tell my wife I won't be home tonight? *Wait!* Is there any chance the thing would hurt Lois - - the Golden Light, I mean?"

Andrews regarded me keenly. "Did it hurt you?"

"No - - just scared me."

"Have you any basis upon which to assume it would injure Lois?"

"Only a scary feeling - - but I suppose that's purely a glandular reaction at seeing the Unknown?"

"Possibly, Cal," Andrews said. "But I suggest that, for your own peace of mind, you ask Lois to sleep at a friend's home."

"I'll do it, Roger. Your phone please?"

Lois demanded an explanation for my staying in town overnight and my suggestion she sleep at the Dvorak home. Not wishing to worry her with the Golden Light, I said I was going to a stag party with Bill . . . and asked Bill to come to the phone to "confirm" it. With unconcealed suspicion that I was up to a trick or two, Lois finally relented. But she did protest; "I wonder *why* you're so insistent I bed with Tessie Dvorak!"

I breathed a prayer as Lois left it at that. Dear girl! She cares about me just enough to boost my ego, yet will accept my occasional eccentricities.

Bill Dvorak stated, when I hung up, "Excellent idea, Cal!"

"Huh?"

"Let's live up to your explanation to Lois. You and Roger and I . . . what more perfect group for a stag party is there?"

Andrews groaned. "I should have suspected that from you, Bill! But, surprisingly, I find myself not averse to the idea. Even psychiatrists need that relaxation they so often prescribe!"

So I went out and got drunk with Roger and Bill.

We were roaring happy when we registered at the Hotel Sir Francis Drake. Bill was assailed with nostalgia as we wobbled across the lobby. "Back in '54!" he cried. "The SFcon . . . good ole Twelfth World Scienceficshun Convenshun! Right upstairs, fellers, right upstairs . . . *Poul* himself lectured, yes, an old A.E.! Brother, that A.E. . . . real nice chap . . . sure and even JWC himself trod the floors . . . " He wept with his memories of happy days past. "Boucher!" he exulted., "Damn clever chap, that Tony . . . And the fans! That Ron sure was a card. A solution for everything! And Jim . . mustn't forget ole Jim . . . "

The task of supporting Bill developed upon Roger, myself, and one of those unidentified bellboys so adept at the job . . . must get experience aplenty, one suspects. Swimming around in Euphoria as I was, I nevertheless noted that Roger wasn't quite so inebriated as he looked. His eyes were pretty sharp. It was he who stuffed Bill and me into bed in our underclothes

In my muddied mind, I was fervently anticipating that unplumbable alcohol-induced oblivion which I surely deserved. And sure enough, I was in a dead slumber within a few minutes. But Something extended a ruthless clammy hand into my stupor and dredged me by degrees out of it. Unease rippled through my body. Those brief skittery dreams which sometimes precede awakening swarmed like spiders across my brain. Then I awoke.

There was no palpable reason for my queasiness. Everything appeared normal enough . . . beyond our window was a big neon sign which alternately drenched the room with garish crimson and ghastly green illumination. In the red-green-red-green glares, I could distinguish Roger's form, nervously asleep in a chair. Bill had buried himself under the covers of the bed and was in profound slumber. I strove to define the uncomfortable little suggestions which had dredged me from my fathomless sleep.

Red-green-red-green . . . I felt like smashing that idiotic sign. Could it have, after all, been only those successive lurid flashes which wakened me? Somehow I knew it was not they.

And then I knew why I knew it was not they.

Sounds were in my room.

Wrong sounds

They were almost just below the threshold of hearing. Tiny cracklings were scampering around the walls. A despairing river of muted twitterings poured slothful across the carpet. Here and there piped fairy-cooings . . . cooings which iced my heart . . .

From nothingness came myriad scrabblings, claws of crab-legions clicking on stone . . . noises myriad but tiny . . . but they were getting louder, louder in pulselike fashion, the sluggish rhythms offsetting the moronic red-green-red-green flarings . . .

My chill erupted when I recognized one factor:

These noises were the very subthreshold vibrations which had caused me such apprehension both times before the appearance of the Golden Light . . . only they no longer were subthreshold!

What could this mean?

I stifled an impulse to whimper with infantile fear.

And then fluctuations of light flitted across the farther wall.

Light which came not from the gaudy neon sign.

Light which was as incorporeal coldness.

Panic burbling in my throat, I tried wildly to get back to sleep. I should have saved myself that abortive labor.

I was *compelled* to look at the strengthening Light.

I tried to scream . . . *but I could not!*

With Herculean effort, a moan flew sorrowing from my rigid lips: *Roger!* It hung shivering in the air for an aeon.

And again: *Roger!*

The photon-flutterings swelled in their intensity with berserker frenzy . . . pulsed, and pulsed, brighter, brighter, nourished by energies beyond any mortal ken. They coruscated with rays of crystalline cold gold. And grew stronger, ever more stronger . . .

A final tormented groan from me: *"Rog . . . er!"*

Then cowls of dusky immobility and oceans of viscosity cascaded over me. The Golden Light was no longer flickering . . . it was pulsating as some Titan-heartbeat. With infinite effort I wrenched my gaze from that horror on the wall to Roger. He was awake!

With bulging eyes he stared at the Light, now throbbing so mightily that it wholly smothered the neon-glare. Dismal sounds quivered around the room . . . trillings sorrowful and warblings tormented . . .

Bill Dvorak chose that moment to awaken. But a single strangled gurgling emitted from him before he fainted. And it was well that he fainted.

For out of the flaming nebulae of the Light a Face was forming. A Face beyond the boundaries of the wildest imaginings to picture . . . my terror was an ascending conflagration in me, a symphony clawing to deranged ascensions in my brain, shrilling through and through as I regarded the very Countenance of Chaos . . .

Thunders of fear roaring through my entire being, I saw two Eyes open in that Face. Two Eyes of darkness indescribable, more ebon than the emptiness between universes . . . *and they looked at me!* And as they did so, an awesome whispering rustled through the entire hotel, shaking the walls, shredding my soul. Words haven't been made which can describe that terrible sound . . . there was only an overpowering impression of Abominations past conception.

And an all-pervading sense of some ravening Spawn.

The whispering achieved a prolonged crescendo . . .

And with the following dimuendo diminished the Light.

Before I swooned I wept hysterically. And it was no comfort to see that Roger was doing the same.

I was hauled out of my slumber of exhaustion by slapping hands and urgent voices. "Goddammit!" breathed someone and I knew it was Bill Dvorak. Coming fully awake, I saw that outside it was day. Bill was still shaking me, and Roger was giving me an odd look.

"Okay, Bill," I barked, "I'm awake! You can cut it out now!" A cold shower partially dispelled my hangover and some of the grumpiness it caused. I hotly wished it could dispel the recollection of the Golden Light and the sounds of horror. I got mad again because the shower couldn't grant my desire.

Bill, Roger, and I were the focus of some pretty queer glances as we went out the hotel. Evidently that ultimate hideous whispering had gone through the whole building. We had a moody-silent breakfast in a nearby cafe, and I could tell that Roger was immensely perturbed over something. His handsome features were remarkably pallid, and he was constantly smoothing his mustache as if he could extract comfort from it. With tones which verged on stridency, he suggested we go up to his office, about a block away.

We were there somewhat early; his cute receptionist hadn't arrived yet. Roger poured us whisky chasers . . . but his hands trembled almost uncontrollably and he spilled plenty of good liquor. I asked him what was the matter and knew I'd made a mistake when he turned his eyes upon me . . . they were positively haunted.

"C-Calvin," he said in an almost-pleading voice, "I-let me get around to what I m-must say . . . in my own way."

I swallowed and felt very uncomfortable. "S-sure, Roger," I somehow managed to reply. This Roger was so different from the imperturbable and ever-collected Roger of only yesterday . . . I felt that whatever was wrong, it was truly awful.

My feelings proved true.

Roger, after some minutes of anxious pacing, at last perched on the edge of his spacious desk. His hagridden eyes rested despairingly and imploringly upon me. Almost to himself, he murmured, "Absolutely no doubt as to your sanity, Calvin."

I nodded jerkily. "B-but . . . do you know what to make of the - - the thing?"

Roger dropped his gaze and agony contorted his face. "Cal . . . Calvin . . .

it so happens I do. Forgive me! Forgive me for the terrible thing I must tell you . . . "

I wanted to yell. "What! What do you . . . mean?"

He covered his eyes with his hand and, with bowed head, spoke: "I . . . Good God, Calvin, I can hardly bring myself to reveal what I must. But . . . well, first, you realize I've done no mean bit of delving into demonology and related fields?"

I could only nod.

"In the course of my dabblings," continued Roger, still covering his eyes, "I picked up a few feeble psi-abilities. Do you know anything about extrasensory perception - - telepathy, telekinesis, teleportation, precognition, etc.?"

"Thanks to Bill, I do." I mumbled. "You mean to say you learned some of these talents?"

"Wild talents. Yes, Calvin, I did - - I believe that anyone sincerely fascinated by demonology and allied studies can't avoid acquiring them - - he comes to learn just how to conjure them up. But in me my wild talents are not at all strong. Yet they were not so feeble that I couldn't catch the mental emanations of that Thing."

"Mental!" came my dismayed cry. "You mean . . . it's *sentient!*"

"Incredibly so. You are no more than a spider to it."

"Your meaning!" I burst out.

Roger took his hand away from his eyes. If there had been agony in him before, he was undergoing Purgatory now. Straining-taut, he explained, "There is a certain species of wasp which preys upon spiders for a quite specialized reason. Perhaps you have read about it. It paralyzes a spider with its sting, then lays eggs in the still-living spider carcass. It drags the spider to an underground burrow and leaves it. The eggs shortly hatch into small larvae which proceed to eat the arachnid. Thus dies the spider so that the wasp-brood shall live."

Ice-claws rippled along my spine. Roger saw the abysmal horror welling in me and he shuddered. "You have guessed c-c-correctly, Calvin. The Golden Light is a four-dimensional entity which requires a three-dimensional host to incubate and feed its spawn."

The sheer hideousness of it numbed me all the way to my basic cells. I sat rigid for many minutes struggling with an impulse to wail like some forsaken waif. Composing myself by some miracle, I asked in very unsteady tones, "C-c-couldn't - - couldn't - - I r-run away?"

Roger, with shrill voice, implored: "Calvin! Calvin! Use your head . . . don't make me tell you that awful answer!"

I had no right to give Roger such an abominable task. I had known the answer even before I asked the question. There was no escape for me. No escape at all. For painfully simple reasons.

Take a two-dimensional being on a two-dimensional planet. Could this being hide from three-dimensional me? It could not. No matter what devious plans the flatlander made, he would be instantly visible to me because he hadn't the third-dimensional advantage of hiding *inside* something.

Hiding *inside* something was futile against a four-dimensional Entity. I said hollowly, "Sorry, Roger. I was grabbing at straws."

Bill Dvorak spoke up, hoarsely: "Roger . . . Good Lord, Roger, isn't there anything we can do for Cal? Such a foul destiny . . . host to the spawn of a fiend . . . "

Roger was as weary as if he were an Atlas supporting Cosmos. He smoothed his mustache and closed his fearful eyes, his fight to think scrawled in tension-lines across his brow. He at last glanced at me, and I thought I saw the tiniest shinings of hope in him. It took him a while to coherently organize his thoughts,

but when he spoke, he chose carefully his words:

"The Spawn of the Entity will not consume you physically. They will feed upon your psyche, Calvin, driving you first insane then imbecilic. They will drain you of all your sentience, all your consciousness, because they themselves are nearly a pure distillate of sentience. You will spend the rest of your life as some senseless yet living heap of human clay in a hidden ward of some mental institution.

"This is a very despicable outlook. And it appears to be as unescapable as Destiny. But, Calvin, we must not lose all hope . . . let us not forget the innate energies of the human mind.

"It is my firm belief that the human mind is a vehicle capable of harnessing and directing forces of literally *infinite* power. I think of the mind as a relay which can, if it is fully closed, tap and wield these forces. Whatever these energies may be, what unnameable Process flings them throughout all the continuums and all the dimensions, I have no idea, but I am sure they exist.

"What we must do is find the secret of closing the Relay. I have managed to close the Relay in my mind an infinitesimal fraction, just enough so that the seepage of energies through it gives me my feeble psi-abilities. You must close it *fully*.

"You have an excellent impetus toward closing your Relay . . . the threat of the Entity. Fear might help; fear has been known to affect men in strange ways. Fear-inspired, a man could probably run a hundred yards in under six seconds. Why not transform a physical fear-reaction such as this into a psychical one?"

"Yes, why not?" I asked with hope-cracked notes.

"The mind," continued Roger, "is not as the body. And this is where our difficulty makes its entrance. I am trying to find if it is at all possible to change a physical fear-stimuli into a mental one, in the sense that the mind will be impelled to fantastic acts. Give me a few minutes, please . . . "

No minutes more strained than those few existed in my entire life. Incubi racked my nerves to shrieking tautness. It was because, if anyone could save me, it was Roger . . .

Roger spoke, urgently, "I think I see hope, Calvin."

My tension flowed away as snow under tropic sun, leaving me flaccid in my seat. My hearing hope-sharpened, I listened as Roger continued· "It is my conviction that the Relay exists deep within the subconscious mind. Or perhaps even profounder are its realms, such as the Freudian Id. Because of this deep location, it is inaccessible to our consciousness and, consequently, our conscious will. Only mental efforts of supreme might which manage to churn the brain's subterranean regions can close the Relay. Ultimate Belief and Faith could conceivably excite the Relay . . . who can tell, perhaps the *faith* of Moses sundered the Red Sea. Maybe it was Samson's monumental *belief* which gave him the power to pull down the temple of the Philistines. And upon this basis could faith-cures be explained.

"But a displacement is involved here . . . though, upon reflection, it is not too great. The *faith* of such Biblical Titans was directed toward a God assumed to be omnipotent. Because the energies of the Relay are equally omnipotent, could not their similarity to God result in their being unleashed by a sincere effort of *faith*?"

"Then all I must do is *believe*?" I asked hoarsely.

"You couldn't, Calvin," Roger said quickly. "Your belief would be conscious only, and a conscious belief means nothing to your subconscious. No, we must compel your subconscious to *believe*, and that excludes any willful effort on your part. This can be done only

through symbolism via hypnotism."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that it will require symbols to convince your subconscious that it can shut the Relay. The impetus toward the Relay's closing is already ours - - the threat of the Golden Light. We may now regard the Golden Light as an impetus-symbol.

"As effective an impetus as it is, it is nevertheless unable to accomplish what we want by itself. Mere death-threats will not coerce the subconscious into believing it can close the Relay . . . if this were true, all men would be immortal and Earth would be governed by Chaos. This is because Man in his present stage of development is not prepared to handle the forces at his subconscious mind's disposal. You must remember that if the Relay's forces are truly unlimited, just one man could inadvertently disrupt this entire space-time continuum. No, Man is still too immature for such powers . . . I think that that greatest of all Mothers, Evolution, intends them for some mature Mankind of the future so that men may be gods.

"To return to the point: because our impetus-symbol has not enough inertia in itself to shut the Relay, we must approach your subconscious via subtler routes. And I think I have the perfect 'route' . . . tell me, Calvin, what is a child's Ultimate Defense against 'ghostlies and ghoulies and things wot go *boomp* i' the dark'?"

My thoughts were too obscured by apprehensions, so I hazarded a guess: "His mother?"

Roger nodded. "After a manner, yes, Calvin. Not his mother, but his mother's womb. Of course, this child is no longer in the womb, so the womb-security is displaced to his *bed*. To exemplify this - - on a particularly eerie night in your childhood, you yourself have probably pulled the covers over your head and felt yourself absolutely safe."

"Many times," I confirmed.

"Do you see now what I'm driving at, Calvin? What we must do is convince - - really convince - - your subconscious that nothing, not man or god, can harm you as long as you remain in bed. This should be an easy task because your childhood faith in your bed's defenses still exists dormantly in you. When the Golden Light appears, the danger-symbol alerts your subconscious. It is given an impetus toward survival. And it has an Ultimate Defense in your bed. If the Golden Light, the danger-symbol, appears to be broaching the barriers imposed by the defense-symbol, your bed, in its belief that nothing can trespass the defense-symbol, your subconscious will fully close the Relay to lend force to the defense-symbol. The ensuing tempests of energies should, I fervently hope, obliterate the Entity."

"You mentioned hypnotism," I said with unsteady voice.

"Yes," Roger assured. "We will need hypnotism to set up the symbols and their interaction in your subconscious. Only hypnotism can make it *believe* in the danger-and-defense symbols. And . . . not too surprisingly, you'll admit . . . I'm prepared to hypnotize you."

My expression of relief, of gratitude, was poignant. And Roger gave me a wan smile. "I sincerely hope we will succeed, Calvin. You are a good man."

"Th - - thank you, Roger."

"Now, if you please, lie down on the couch by the wall . . . "

Roger submerged me in the anesthesia of hypnotic trance in less than ten minutes. Before I completely blacked out, I was mightily grateful that I had such friends as Bill and Roger.

When I came to, it was half an hour to noon. Looking around, I saw that Bill and Roger were giving me their anxious regard. Bill asked, "Feeling okay, Cal?"

"Guess so," I said slowly. "Roger . . . did you do your work all right? Did

you convince . . . "

Roger made a helpless little motion with his spread palms. "I . . . believe . . . I did. But full certainty can't be mine until - - after - - the Entity tries to seize you."

Roger was giving me all the confidence possible. Until the Entity *tries*, he said. I was thankful for that slight reassurance and said, "No matter what happens, you've done your best, Roger. If this works out as we want it to, you'll have my everlasting gratitude."

Roger dabbed at the perspiration glinting across his high brow. "Don't feel obliged, Calvin . . . I like you and I mean it."

I felt all twisted inside - - Roger was one hell of a good guy.

"We do now . . . ?" Bill asked.

Roger gestured at his desk. "I've work to catch up on today. There's nothing more I can do for Calvin - - why don't you take him over to your house for a bull-session? Calvin - - could you please come back here tomorrow morning at eight?"

"If you want me to, Roger."

"I want you to. Well . . . *adios*, friends."

"Bye."

I left with Bill.

I didn't go to Bill's home, however. I asked him to let me off at my house. "I want to think this thing over," I told him. You . . . understand . . . how I feel, huh, Bill?"

Bill registered grave affirmation. "Sure as hell understand. S-see you, Cal."

"Tomorrow, pal."

"S-sure. Tomorrow."

As Bill drove off I felt somewhat choked up inside. *Tomorrow*, we had agreed. We didn't mention that tomorrow might not come for me.

An anxious Lois met me in the house. One look she took at my haggard features, and she gasped. "C-Cal! Calvin! What's wrong . . . oh, darling, you aren't ill . . . ?"

"Not by a long shot, beloved, and I wish to God I were only ill. It's something else - - have mercy on me and don't make me tell . . . "

A determination dawned in Lois' gaze; a firmness made taut her matchless lips. With a voice decisive yet still-silvery, she said, "You're going to tell me, Calvin. You're going to tell me everything. Wives were made to share the troubles of their husbands."

How does one resist a Lois so intent? One cannot. So I told her everything, sparing her nothing. Her eyes widened first with disbelief, then with horror, then finally drooped with resignation. Tears filled them and came out to trace tiny trails down her cheeks. But she did not sob. Neither did she throw hysterics. She just looked at me with mute agony and eventually said, "I love you very much, Calvin. Please do not let It claim you."

I caught her in my arms, crushing her in my desperation. "I'll try! God, Lois, but I'll try!"

"For your sake and mine, darling."

"For *your* sake and mine," I uttered fervently.

She regarded me with moist eyes of love. "I . . . I'll cook dinner, darling C-Calvin."

I could only kiss her and watch her head kitchenwards.

I stood silent for an eternal minute. What could I do?

I knew.

I headed for my *sanctum sanctorum* and settled down to work on A VINE ON VESUVIUS. Feverishly I labored; when Lois came to announce dinner, I had completed two and a half additional chapters.

Our supper was a tense eternity of anguished looks and somehow tasteless food. Thank God Lois did not question me as to the truth of the Entity. Thank God she so loved me. Still in a silence of soul-pain, we finished our coffee. Wraith-quiet, sylph-lovely, Lois cleared

the table of dishes, her eyes resting spectral on mine. Fear was in them, not for herself but for me.

"L-Lois, beloved . . . " I said with a constricting throat.

"Yes, darling?"

"If . . . things . . . don't go right - - beloved, I want you to know that no man ever had a better wife and loved her so."

She kissed me long and tenderly on the forehead and vanished into the kitchen, sob-spasms shaking her shoulders.

I returned to A VINE ON VESUVIUS and launched into a fury of work. I think perhaps I wanted the imaginary universe of my novel to swallow me up, consume me, liberate me from the pursuing Unknown.

Hours were mercury, trickling past, insensate shiny fragments of irresistible Time. The only reality was the clacking keys of my typewriter, the lines upon lines of print coming as if by magic to the paper. I built my novel up to fantastic pinnacles of emotion, to soul-shattering climaxes, my own terror and torment flowing from my heart to my fingers to my work. Finally came Cataclysm, eons of fury and madness, lava blasted high into burning skies, earthquakes, towns consumed and cities consumed, smoke, steam, Pandemonium, boiling and boiling to the final climax, the union of the two main characters amidst frenzy and wrath.

I was surprised to find I had finished my book.

My wall clock said: 11.

Outside reigned Night.

I pushed away from my desk and stood up. I turned out the lights of my den and entered the hallway which led to the living room. I saw Lois in there, asleep on the broad divan we'd bought only last month and were so proud of. So pale and indrawn she seemed, her features troubled even in sleep and drenched in the feeble rays of a far streetlight.

A solitary car rumbled by along the dim street outside, the senseless glare of its headlamp-eyes flicking across the walls. I shuddered and headed for the bedroom. I would be lonely without Lois by my side, but I wouldn't stand for her to become involved with It.

In darkness I undressed. I looked at the black bulk of my bed. *You are my Womb*, I thought. *You are my Protector. Thou, oh, thou, my defense so invincible!*

In only my shorts, I clambered in between the cold sheets. Sheets which beloved Lois should have warmed . . .

My reasons for not being able to sleep were very good.

Twist. Turn. Wriggle. Squirm. Was there no comfortable position for me? In my hypersensitivity, the slightest wrinkle became a jagged range of crags gnawing into my flesh. Be uncomfortable. And wait.

And wait.

Was that shimmering It . . .

Only car-lights, distant and distant, sweeping past. Fading rumble of a motor. Some happy night-riding idiot. Perhaps out with a girl. Love in a car in a stained back seat. Squirm. Wriggle. Wait.

Meeeiiiuuuu! Meeeeoooooo!

I smothered an insane shriek. It was only Muffin wanting out. Damned bastard cat . . . let him make a mess on the floor . . .

Wait. And wait

Would It never come? ? Tension tore its way to Everest-summits in me. I endured Purgatory. I wanted to dive into Cocytus, the river of wailing. I was drowning in Phlegethon, the river of fire. Invisible fire was all over me; my exploding panic-embers.

At last I could no longer bear the waiting. I had to *do* something. Make a sandwich, glean the simple pleasures of eating. I got out of bed, cursing the chill of the floor against my feet. I headed for the kitchen . . . . . .

And I was transfixed with fear.

The Golden Light had come . . .

And I was out of bed!

My defense!

Gone!

Came the quintessence of all nightmares, inconceivable tides of insanity. Filling the whole room was the Golden Light, engulfing me, so huge I wanted to scream. The Face I saw clearly, oh so clearly . . . those eyes of interspatial ebony now contained wafting galaxies, novae, supernovae, and nebulae. Focus on me they did, the incarnation of calculation and mercilessness. They stabbed right through and beyond. Immobile remained the Face but the ice-radiance pulsated brighter, stronger . . .

And stronger and stronger, and it was accompanied by sounds . . . chirps, twitterings . . . little spider - skitterings, cooings and sighings and long-wailings, strengthening with the brightening Light, climbing to crescendoes and coasting on dimuendoes, bellowing into infinite bassos, shrieking along tenor planes, warbling into contraltos . . . the Eyes expanded . . . shot into me, and through and through, relentless, ravening . . .

The dimensions around me were being twisted and tortured. Shrieks rent and reverberated around all Space and all Time. Shrillings which shredded me, shaking my individual atoms, slashing my molecules, my cells, my mind and my soul. And then I was swelling.

I was swelling!

My atoms were flying apart!

Distortions and more distortions, ever-wrenching, trembled throughout the golden continuum of the Light . . . no longer a man I was. I was a Something, disembodied, looking into my room so strangely contorted . . .

I was losing my mind.

In me was a little Voice, gibbering and piping: *go back! go back!* To my Bed. *O, Womb! O, Protector so impenetrable! Never should I have forsaken Thou . . . will ever I again see Lois . .*

My darling! My darling! *Help me!*

It was only thought, not voice. I kept her image before me, and from it drew courage. I fought through the wailing dimensions shifting all around, through the Golden Light, toward my Bed . . .

Essence of Satan spat from the black Eyes.

Crawled through the Light shrilling shadows, swirling, swirling, here coalescing, there disintegrating, spinning . . they twined as eel-spawn around and around me, stopping me, and then I was roaring without sound, roaring louder . . .

The Eyes detonated!

They now devoured Eternity!

They blazed hideousness at me. I screamed defiantly at them. Yet still they blazed, spitting in fathomless darkness the equivalent of the fires born in the guts of suns. The wind so searing yet so chilling pushed at me, vehemently and always more vehemently, until I was immobilized into a position of undying conflict. Through the golden-ebon maelstrom hurricaning all around, I caught fleeting glimpses of my room . . . and it was horribly misplaced . . .

Its configurations were intertwined as if I were dwelling inside the walls!

And then I saw dear Muffin my cat and I voicelessly cried. Long and loud, and Muffin didn't hear . . . he looked up at me, through me, and fire crackled in his amber eyes.

Muffin! Muffin! O, but it is I . . .

Yet it was not I. I was some vast, whimpering whirlpool, inwards collapsing yet bursting out to all Forever. Everything was fuzzy-clear . . . clear-fuzzy . . . light and dark and black and white . . . the spectrum a deranged pinwheel rotating, rotating, glinting into those ultimately evil Eyes . . .

Lois . . .

Lois!

She was lovely and languorously before me, she my wife she my love, and I screamed her name. Moaned, long and silently thunderous. Moaned, because

she-Lois wouldn't couldn't hear me, because she walked into me, into and beyond and she picked up Muffin. "Muffinie dear," she crooned, "why are ookums growling? Snuggy-wuggy seeie a big bad doggie?"

She of Immortal beauty, She of Venus-love! Her image impossibly heartening fed bravery to my cringing heart, sent cataclysms of determination thunderbolting through my tenuous still-expanding veins. I *had* to reach my Bed, For myself and for her!

But more for Her, She my Woman!

The shadows did battle with me, and with millionfold might I fought against them . . . and they grew violent, hurtling through the misty infinity of the Light and the Face to batter against me . . . where my feet should be was a mucky slobbering which sucked and frustrated . . .

Through the buckling and mutilated dimensions strewn throughout the misshapen Cosmos I was struggling in, I caught glimpses of my Bed. It seemed nearer . . . I cried to the Lord, *It is nearer!*

Perhaps triumph would after all be mine . . .

Then was my morale sundered.

The Face was *sneering!* The Eyes taunted me!

I was spun and swept to howling Realms where spheroids gyrated in the slobbering muck . . . concussions of agony and searing light exploded all around, fulminating me into a higher level of monstrous continua, casting me into a dimensionless Space where I was given omnipotent perception, where I looked into triangular sundering dimensions, where I looked into two enormous amber flamings which were Muffin's wrathful eyes, where I gazed across vistas limitless in which Shapes tumbled and tumbled mindlessly mighty into maws of tortured universes . . .

The shadows closed in and I sobbed through the whispering muck. Transposed against those panoramas of insanity was my Bed. Beyond it was the Face . . . the gigantic leering Face swathed in its Golden Light . . . the shadows flurried, harder, invariably harder, slimed yet unslimed, resisting yet resistless . . .

Then *they* came, the larvae, the Entity-spawn, writhing across those anguished continuums, wriggling and wrigghng in their formless tiny black dimensions. Swarms upon swarms, squadrons upon squadrons, escadrille upon escadrille . . . they came in millions and in billions and I could only feel the most abysmal terror . . .

Closer-drawing, coming nearer . . . they would burrow into my being and feed upon my psyche, sapping my sentience, sapping the I which is *I*. How ever could I confront those convoluted legions of shimmering individual dimensions, coming cloudlike toward me? If I had had a material body, I would have gone insane . . .

But I no longer had a material body; the particles of *me* were dispersed among unguessable continua leaving only psyche-Me.

So my sanity I retained, and I gathered all the willpower I ever had or would possess in a last monumental effort to win through . . . my Bed was still as a montage across the scopes of horror . . . the Entity-spawn bowed and danced and slithered in those descriptionless dimensions of theirs, murmuring to me to Follow, their child-voices a long susurrus, beginningless, endless . . .

They showed me the countenance of Fear. They showed me ravenous infinities of blackness where I would feed them until the end of time . . . And the million fiend-faces in the changing spaces were duplicates of the contemptuous Face in the Golden Light . . .

In a final eruption, O how magnificent, my willpower swelled through the gaseous I as some berserk supernova. I was flung as if from the hand of Thor

toward my Bed . . . I pummelled through the shimmying demon-larvae . . . I was almost upon the multidimensional montage of my Bed . . . *I was upon it!*

The Face bellowed with frigid illumination, the coruscating seas of light striving to rip me off the phantom-Bed . . the gnat-swarms of ebon dimensions drove as some incalculably furious Storm at me . . . thunderheads of wrath and desperation smashed into and through me . . . but the ghostly covers I was already pulling over myself . . .

The Face emitted so horrible a sound it curdled my mind. Its foul brood wrenched in shapeless rage . . .

And in the same instant, I felt Something snick shut in my subconscious mind . . . Something which could tap energies of infinity . . .

There was one all-consuming detonation of intolerable forces, inconceivable, blasting outward and outward through all the continua and all the cosmos, withering everything before it, annihilating the Face and its indescribable spawn, still unsatiable, for ever unsatiated . . .

Then only prenatal lightlessness, warmth, quietude.

I woke up to find myself in a hospital.

I rang for the nurse.

Twenty minutes later, Roger, Bill, and Lois were clustering around me. Even Tessie Dvorak was there, her eyes quite awed. Lois sank to my side, wept, and cradled my head in the soft crook of her arm. Roger gripped my hands and gasped, "You . . . you defeated it?"

I nodded tiredly. "Not only defeated it - - destroyed it."

"Then . . . the Relay closed?"

"It sure did!" I breathed. "Was there any outward evidence?"

Roger smoothed his mustache. "It so happens there was. Three walls of your bedroom were blown into the street."

I jerked. "Lois! You weren't hurt, beloved . . . ?"

She brushed back stray locks of my hair reassuringly. "I wasn't hurt, darling I was in the kitchen - - I'd just put Muffin outside. I was very much frightened . . . " She trembled against me

A plea in my voice, I queried, "You didn t *see* anything?"

She shook her head.

I related my soul-blistering experience to Roger and Bill. Roger at last meditated aloud: "I think, Calvin, in fact I *know* that your conflict was carried out on a plane of being above ours. Although I can't be sure, it may have been the fourth dimension . . . or even the fifth. This explains why Lois didn't see a thing."

"But the walls of my room . . . " I protested.

Roger shrugged. "I've no way to substantiate my thought, but I imagine the walls were blown out because a very tiny fraction of the energies your subconscious unleashed in whatever dimension it was in 'leaked through' into this our dimension, the third. I do believe that you obliterated everything throughout the entire infinite extension of whatever existence-plane you were trapped in. This because the Relay's forces should be themselves limitless."

I sighed. "Whatever it was, I owe it to you that I came through all this, Roger."

Roger gave a fervent negation. "Not at all, Calvin! Good God, man, but if you hadn't had such terrific determination to get back to your bed, you wouldn't be here now . . . if anyone saved you, it was yourself!"

I didn't hear much more . . . only a snatch of Bill's jubilant voice exulting, " . . . what a yarn this'll make!" I was too busy being glad I was alive, too busy confirming the fact I still had Lois.

Also, I couldn't wait to get A VINE ON VESUVIUS off to the publishers . . . that it would hit the best-seller lists there wasn't a doubt!

The FIRES of KESSA

By Don Wilcox

This was the way to heaven - - and lovely women rode the fires of Kessa to the stars. None suspected that it was a rocket ship that flew only to hell!

THE SANDS shrieked, lashing the walls of desert rock. Berk stumbled on, fighting his way among the drifts, wondering if he would die.

" In the name of . . . *Kessa!*"

His parched lips could hardly mumble the words. Were they to be his last? Strange words for him. He was barely able to remember the name of the god. There had been so many worlds, so many gods.

Kessa! He had no right to call upon Kessa. He had only himself to blame for coming, himself to blame for landing miles away from his exact destination. But that was his way, never to alarm a primitive people by roaring down on them in a monstrous sky ship. It had been the same when he had come before, many years ago. But crossing the desert had been easy then. There had been no blinding storm.

He plodded on, exhausted, desperately thirsty, scarcely able to breathe through the protective coverings he had wrapped over his face. In his mind he began to see sand-scoured bones.

His own. Gleaming white. Then the slow return to dust. Lost in the blowing sands . . . and all because he had come back to this remote world with the intention of keeping a promise he had once made to a small boy.

If he should die in this desert would traces of his skeleton someday be found by the natives? Would the slight differences between his own bone structure and theirs be noticed? Probably not. Only an archaeologist would bother to observe . . . Berk slumped against a barrier of stone. Already he was half buried in the swirling drifts. His eyes, tortured from the blasts of heat, played tricks. He seemed to see the face of a girl before him.

A phantom of the desert! The girl's eyes shone strangely. A band of jewels was over her brow, and her dark hair streamed in the wind.

It was only a wisp of memory. Something like the daughter of an archaeologist he had piloted between planets long ago. There had been an hour of infatuation, but Berk had never seen her afterward. That's the way, when the excitement of new worlds gets into your blood. You pass by the old friendships for the new. You ignore the gold to pursue the glitter.

But the girl and her father had died long ago. This was a phantom.

Yet the eyes were there, shining strangely into his.

The wrappings around his face were being pulled apart. A canteen of water was forced to his lips.

"*Drink!*" It was a voice he had never heard before, a voice that seemed to still the furies of the wind. "*Drink or you will surely die.*"

CHAPTER II

Berk slept. The scream of the winds lowered and fell silent. He slept with a prayer of gratefulness.

Sleeping, he talked to himself of his purpose. The fitful dream swept him through the memory that had brought him back to this world:

Long ago he had come, a space explorer, discovering new worlds. He had found the city beside the sea. In a rude cave-home that overlooked the city he had made friends with a little bright-eyed boy.

The boy's name was Daunsog.

Berk had learned to talk with Daunsog. The boy had asked endless questions and Berk had instructed him.

"Will you come back to see me again, Berk?"

The years passed (in Berk's dream thoughts) *and Daunsog, grown to manhood, stood tall and straight, peering from the mountain ridge toward the desert wondering if Berk would come back some day.*

The years passed and Daunsog's life was almost spent . . .

Berk roused up. The restlessness in his

heart would not let him sleep any longer.

He began to walk again. He swabbed his eyes, shaded them with his hand against the afternoon glare. He brushed the sands from the black strappings of his storm-beaten red military costume. His lungs breathed with new assurance. The storm crisis had passed. *She* has rescued him.

Who?

He wandered among the drifts looking for her. The gaunt towers of stone cast purple shadows across the yellow sands. He saw no one.

He called and his voice echoed weirdly. There was no answer. A phantom, then? Or reality - - a girl of the desert with shining dark eyes and flowing black hair?

The sun was lowering. He quickened his pace. He was youthful, still in his thirties. His natural spirit of adventure gave him remarkable resilience. In his thirties - - yes, in spite of his *centuries*. The wise spaceman knew how to beat the game of time. Travel in a state of suspended animation. Once on course, he would simply turn off his life for the long leap between worlds. Half a century or more of Berk's time had gone by since his previous visit.

"Will Daunsog still remember me?" he wondered. "Did he retain any of our conversations about the wonders of space travel?"

The language of Daunsog ran through his mind. Again he thought of the girl who had pressed the canteen of water to his lips. "She spoke the language of Daunsog!"

He stopped and gazed back at the fantastic towers of stone. Surely no one could live out in this wild desert. *She* must have strayed from the coastal city that lay ahead.

He hurried on. A pink and purple twilight came over the land. The familiar mountain ridge loomed against the sky. He remembered it, a horseshoe of red rock above the sea, enclosing the primitive city of mud and stone. Within this horseshoe the worshippers of Kessa lived and died, knowing a little of the sea, a little of the desert and nothing more.

He paused, recalling the faintly visible coils of smoke he had seen above the ridge on his previous visit. It was the same now. The city would be there, unchanged.

He heard the slightest sound of patting steps on the bare stretch of rock. He glanced back and caught sight of her - - the girl who had saved his life. She was following him.

CHAPTER III

He waited, calling to her softly. She sat at a little distance from him, not speaking, but watching him intently.

She was a splendidly formed girl Her slender, half-clothed body was like gold in the waning light of evening. Jewels glinted from her costume. The glitter of green and amber, banded about her forehead and beaded at her throat, was a jewelled hood, out of which her dark hair flowed over her shoulders like a mantle.

Her face betrayed strangely mixed emotions. From her boldness in rescuing a stranger from a desert storm, Berk would have expected the fearlessness of her features, the light of daring in her dark eyes. But there were deeper meanings in her mysterious gazing; as if she had retreated, in awe of the one she had aided

In a low, calm voice, Berk tried to reassure her. She needn't fear him. His costume might be unlike anything she had ever seen; the insignia of the spaceman that adorned his red, black-trimmed suit might be as meaningless to her as the gleaming black-and white ray pistols he wore at his side. But she could see from his demeanor that he was another human being, much like herself. He wore no helmet. He breathed

the air of this world almost as naturally as she herself. And he talked her language.

"Friend." It was the third time he had said it.

"Yes?"

"I am your friend . . . I am a stranger from far away. . . But I already know about your city. . . "

"Yes."

"I come in peace to see a friend."

"Yes."

What did she mean, *yes?* That she knew? He moved a little closer and sat, regarding her with admiration. Her beauty could easily have dazzled him. He couldn't allow himself to think of that. He was dealing with complex emotions, the timidity that had somehow overtaken her boldness, and again, the wide-eyed awe.

"You know nothing about me, of course," he tried to be casual in his game of winning her trust, "but if you come from the city down by the sea, you may know a certain friend of mine - - someone named Daunsog that I've come to see."

"Yes, I know."

"I promised him I would come back."

"Yes, I know."

This was exasperating. Why was she pretending? She probably didn't even know the name of Daunsog. Berk tried a different approach.

"Why were you out there on the desert?"

"I was running away."

"Why?"

"You already know," she said, looking at him intently. "You know everything."

"What?"

"I'm sorry I was running away. I was confused. I didn't mean to be sinful. I was afraid of the sacrifice. Please forgive me."

"Forgive you! What are you talking about? You saved my life. We both know that. We both know the storm came to an end right afterward. If I were superstitious - - "

"Oh, *Prophet Berk!"* She moved toward him in an attitude of worship. "I *know* who you are. You needn't pretend to be a stranger to our world. At first I was deceived. But when I studied your face I remembered the picture. You are Berk the Prophet! You've come back!"

CHAPTER IV

Superstitions! The silly beliefs of primitive peoples! As Berk sat there, studying the beauty of the girl who spoke to him, he wished mightily that all the twisted half-truths of the Kessa faith were at the bottom of the sea. He was simply a man, gazing upon the hypnotic beauty of a finely formed girl. Yet she called him *Prophet* and looked upon him with religious awe, and believed he knew everything, and hoped he could forgive her!

What on earth had he walked into? What sort of build-up had Daunsog given him in his absence? What in the name of - - *Kessa?*

"Are you sure I'm a prophet? . . . Prophets can be very human, you know . . . What is your name?"

"Daunsa."

"Daunsa?" He studied her with new interest. "You mean - - - "

"I am the daughter of Daunsog."

"Well! That explains - - " He broke off, his thoughts whirling. It was true, then, that she had seen a picture of him - - the small token he had left with Daunsog. Yes, it was possible that she might recognize him. But this prophet business, and her running away, and asking him not to think her sinful - - it was all too much for Berk to swallow at first gulp. The more so because he was so fascinated by her loveliness! So this was the daughter of Daunsog, that cute little inquisitive fellow who had listened to Berk's tall tales about the wonders of worlds beyond. Now he could see the resemblance in her facial

features. He spoke her name with reverence. "Daunsa."

"Yes."

"You are very lovely."

"Thank you."

"You must bear a very close resemblance to your father."

"Yes." The girl was suddenly weeping.

"Believe me, Daunsa, I don't know why you were running away, but I'm sure there must have been a reason. Take me to your father, and let's see if we can't learn the meaning of all this."

"I have just buried my father in the desert," Daunsa said quietly. "You knew, didn't you? You must have been there watching over my shoulder." Her moist eyes looked at him in great questioning. "That's why you came - - to guide me back to the ways of Kessa. Forgive me for losing faith . . . in my anguish . . . It would have been so easy to die . . . as he died. Forgive me."

Berk touched her hand. It was the only gesture he could think of, in hope of consoling her. But she drew her hand back in alarm, and the light of amazement filled her dark eyes.

"I never thought I should be touched by a prophet," she said.

He rose, walked about, gazing at the darkening skies. He returned to her. "I'm very human, you know."

"Listen! . . . It's a party of searchers. They're looking for me."

A group of five or six persons had appeared at a little distance, silhouetted against one of the two orange moons that had edged up over the black line of mountains.

"Please forgive me if I hide from them, Berk," the girl whispered. "I'll return, soon, but I can't face them now. Goodbye. I'm going to hide."

"I'll hide with you," Berk said. "Believe me, I'm very human."

CHAPTER V

The search party stopped within a few feet of their hiding place. The two torches were stuck in the side of a drift, and the group treated themselves to food and rest. The torchlight cast a pale glow over the sandy slope beyond the jagged rocks within which Berk and Daunsa nestled. A zigzag break in the rocks afforded a narrow view of the party and brought their voices through sharply.

"How much farther do we have to go?"

"What do you care? It's better than standing guard at the plaza."

"We haven't even picked up a trail. For all we know, she walked into the sea instead of the desert."

"Let's camp for the night. Old Yig Morrow won't know but what we walked our legs off. If he doesn't like it, let him do his own searching."

"Camp if you want to. I'll go on searching - - but not because Yig Morrow said so."

"Yig Morrow would murder both of you for those remarks."

"No doubt. He must have his diversions."

"We're wasting the night. The girl ought to be brought back. She's been chosen to honor Kessa - - "

"By whom?"

"By Kessa, naturally. Nobody dares say it's Yig Morrow himself who decides these matters."

"It's Yig Morrow that gets to marry them before they burn off into the Beyond."

"Watch your language, Cog. Yig Morrow would hang you on a spear."

Berk listened tensely. He and Daunsa were side by side, deep in the shadows She seemed to tremble whenever some dangerous remark was made by Cog, the young skeptic.

With full voiced boldness Cog pursued, "If I were Daunsa's father, I would command her to run away. Why should she stay and let herself enter the fire route to the Beyond?"

"It's an honor that doesn't come to many."

"Only to the beautiful. And only once." Cog's words were answered by cold silence. Was it human sacrifice they were talking about, Berk wondered. Now Cog spoke again of Daunsog, evidently believing him still alive. "Maybe her father did command her to run away. How do we know? We never get to see him. They say he's in his tower, but how do we know?"

"Yig Morrow protects him so nothing can happen to him. After all, he's the only one who really knew the Prophet Berk."

The Prophet Berk! Berk stiffened The visit with little Daunsog had not been forgotten - - far from it!

Now Cog, the keen-eyed young guard, was saying, "For all we know, Daunsog may be dead. If he were alive, do you think he'd let his daughter be sacrificed?"

"Those words will mock you, Cog, when they hang you on a spear. I predict - - - "

"Our leader speaks, at last! Go ahead, *predict!*"

"I predict that Daunsa will be found. That her aged father will bless her from his tower. That she and our brilliant master Yig Morrow will share a full day of final devotions - - "

"In his bed-chamber."

"And then, according to the tradition given us by the Prophet Berk - - "

Berk winced. He was possessed by a wild desire to rush out of hiding and cry down the outrageous falsehoods. He caught a breath of warning from Daunsa at his side. "*Hsssh.*"

" - - that she will enter the Dart of Fire, and the blaze will take her to the waiting arms of Kessa somewhere Beyond - - "

"In other words," Cog commented bitterly, "she'll give Yig Morrow a day of pleasure - - to the glory of Kessa, of course - - and then go up in smoke, while our great Yig Morrow looks on and smiles."

The leader retorted with anger. "I further predict that if Cog utters one more word of blasphemy, he'll be clubbed over the head and left to die on the desert."

"To the glory of Kessa, of course," Cog said.

The leader struck him over the head, struck him again as he fell. The party picked up their torches and moved on. Cog was left lying on the ground, moaning softly with each breath. Berk wondered if he was dying.

"Daunsa!" Berk whispered.

Daunsa had slipped away from him and was hurrying through the darkness to the side of the fallen man.

CHAPTER VI

Cog began to return to consciousness. The sting of the medicines that Berk had applied to his injuries was like a whip. A lash to his fighting spirit. He tried to come to his feet. All he wanted was a chance at the leader of the party, to square accounts. Daunsa tried to quiet him.

"Hush, Cog. They're coming back. They'll kill you."

"I'll fight the whole bunch, then. Let me up. Who's this? Who's this man with you? Where did he come from?"

"It's the Prophet Berk. He's come back."

"I don't believe it. I don't believe anything. It's all a fog of lies. Don't let them take you, Daunsa. You know your father never believed that was what the Prophet really meant - - "

"Stop raving, Cog! They'll hear you. They'll kill you!"

"If it's Berk the Prophet, he's planned my death already. I never believed - - "

Berk took action. He touched the pistol at his side. The ray that penetrated Cog's body was invisible. The effect was instantaneous. Cog's speech broke off. His arms came up tight to his

body, and he went paralyzed, head to foot.

"He's not talking! He's hardly breathing. What happened? What happened, Berk? Is he dying?"

Berk stilled her anguished whispers. He shouldered the frozen burden, and together they hiked through the darkness. Well out of range of the torchlights, they glanced back and knew that the party had stopped to look for the body of the fallen man.

"They'll find our tracks," Daunsa said. "We'll be overtaken."

"And if they do - - what? Would they be so reckless as to defy the Prophet Berk?" Berk lifted his head. Like it or not, it was his duty to act the prophet.

Through the long night they threaded their way along the trails by the light of two moons. Berk bore the motionless body of Cog on his shoulders.

At dawn they took refuge in a mountain cave that overlooked the city. Berk breathed nostalgically of the scented air, the mellow smells of the sea mingled with the fragrance of "Kessa flowers." He remembered well the beauty of the quiet gray sea with the pink of dawn on the horizon. But neither from this world or any other did he recall any form of beauty that surpassed the feminine loveliness of Daunsa, lying near him on a bed of grasses near the mouth of the cave, her golden body kissed by the first light of the new day.

She slept from exhaustion, yet her senses were ever alert. Her eyes half-opened, she whispered, "They're coming, Berk. They'll find us."

Berk lifted the inert form of Cog, carried him farther back into the cave. "Watch over him, Daunsa."

"And you?"

"I have my own plan."

When the guards clambered down over the path within sight of the cave, Berk stood ready, waiting. He heard their low-spirited grumbling as they approached. They were trying to agree on some suitable lie for a report to Yig Morrow. Not only had they failed to find Daunsa; they had also lost one of their own number - - by "accident." At the sight of Berk, they stopped short.

They stared at him. He stood tall and impervious, his hands at his hips. The versatile little ray pistol at his side meant nothing to them; theirs was the simple world of spears and clubs. It was the keenness of Berk's face and the other-worldness of his costume that arrested them. His voice, unlike any voice they had ever heard, chilled them with emotions of guilt.

"You return empty-handed, I see."

No one answered

"And where is your other guard?"

They continued to stare.

"Do you not recognize me, a messenger of Kessa?"

The leader of the party tried to shrink back. Berk spoke sharply. "Step forward and listen to my words."

The edged forward hesitantly.

"Hear me. You seek Daunsa. She went to the desert to seek Berk the Prophet, and to lead him back to the city. I have come. The girl is with me."

The party murmured and rattled their confusion.

"You wish to see her?" Berk asked. "Come, Daunsa."

She stood before them, unafraid, radiant, her jewels flashing in the morning sun, her dark eyes glinting defiance.

Berk said, "Tell your ruler that Daunsa is with Berk the Prophet. Tell him she is needed to look after Cog, whom you struck down."

The leader suddenly unleashed a nervous stream of self-justification. "I had to strike him down. He was saying words that offended Kessa."

"If Kessa was offended, let Kessa strike him down. Who are you to kill a man for thinking thoughts?"

"He's dead, then?" the leader stammered. "Where is he?"

Berk brought the lifeless Cog from back in the cave and held him before their view. In their eyes was the light of panic. Berk dropped him lightly to the ground.

"But this is not the end for Cog," Berk the Prophet said. "Kessa has plans for him. He is not dead. Stand back, all of you, for when he comes to life he will be an angry man."

The fearful group backed away. Berk, his hands at his hips, worked at the ray pistol. An invisible stream of power shot from it, neutralizing the paralytic grip that held Cog lifeless. Cog's rigid muscles relaxed. He turned, came up on one elbow, opened his eyes and looked about. He caught sight of the other guards and their leader, and came to his feet in a surge of anger.

"Easy, Cog. You're not strong enough to fight," Berk said. There was no need to say it. In his weakened condition Cog could not have given chase. The leader and his party had seen enough. They turned and ran. Three of them beat a trail down into the streets of the city. The leader and one other scrambled back over the ledge toward the desert.

Then Cog, his eyes red with unspent furies, turned to face Berk and Daunsa, to ask for an explanation - - "In the name of Kessa!"

But it was Daunsa's words that Berk found most disturbing: "You have brought Cog back to life. You can do the same for my father!"

CHAPTER VIII

Whew! This business of being a prophet was a thorn in the flesh. The girl's request was enough to make him perspire. Her childlike faith! She reached to touch the sleeve of his uniform.

"You *do* have the powers of Kessa."

Berk shook his head. "You have buried your father?" He saw the tears come to her eyes. "Believe me, I wanted nothing more than to visit with him once again. But I can't ask Kessa to bring him back. I'm sorry."

There was no more to be said. He would sense the disappointment every time he looked in her eyes for many days to come.

She walked away, asking to be alone. Berk and Cog watched her from the cave. They saw the guard from the palace who approached with an official message, and they overheard. Yig Morrow had sent for her.

They saw her walk down across the town, through the twisted streets among the stone-and-mud buildings, through the shadows of the open plaza by the sea, toward the spiral ascent at one end of the palace. She walked alone, at a little distance behind the guard, and though people called to her she didn't turn aside.

"What will Yig Morrow say to her?" Berk asked

"Probably what he said before - - that she should prepare to enter the Dart of Fire. It's supposed to be a high privilege to go to Kessa by the fire route."

"How does one actually go anywhere in this land?"

"One goes to Kessa only by thinking so," said Cog, the skeptic. "What it means is, she'll be burned to ashes in a public ceremony - - as if you didn't know."

"Is this Yig Morrow's idea of a sacred trip to join the god?"

"Not Yig's. Yours," Cog said.

"Prophet or not, I'm a stranger here," Berk said. "I'm asking for information."

"Then come down to the plaza with me and I'll show you the Dart of Fire, built truly upon your own words."

CHAPTER IX

From his place on the balcony of the palace the ruler of the city watched the girl approach. His eyes lighted at the sight of her. Her steps reminded him of the calm dignity of her father. No

one had been more important to the success of Yig Morrow, in ruling this little seaside nation, than Daunsa's father.

The girl moved gracefully up the spiral ascent. Yig Morrow, breathing deeply with inner excitement, dismissed his guards, and made ready to meet her. He donned his gray feathered cape, preened himself for a moment at the polished black marble wall which gave back his reflection, then settled himself at a table feigning ease and unconcern.

He had discussed the matter of Daunsa with his trusted officer a number of times in recent days, and his plans for the girl had undergone a change. He had sighed at every memory of her beauty, and this had led him to debate within himself whether Kessa might not be willing to wait. A single day of marriage before the fires were allowed to take her beautiful body away forever seemed very little. In Yig Morrow's private realm, any beauty would soon grow tiresome. But while many of the females who had undergone this double ceremony of marriage and departure had become unendurable within a matter of hours, because of outrageously bad tempers, Yig Morrow felt sure that a person of Daunsa's kindness and gentleness might add pleasure to the palace for many days.

This plan had so filled him, in recent hours, that he had thought of pressing Daunsa's father for approval.

But Daunsa's father was missing from the tower, one of the guards had said. This news, along with the later word that Daunsa herself had run away, had been highly upsetting to Yig Morrow's palace.

However, this morning the guards, returning from their desert search, had brought the reassuring news. The girl had come back. And now, with stately step, she approached his table.

She listened in silence as Yig Morrow set forth his change of plan. She did not appear properly pleased.

"Then Kessa does not want me, after all?" she asked.

"I want you. Kessa can have you later."

"My father did not warn me of this."

"He'll approve, I'm sure."

"It's too late for that, I'm afraid."

"Why?"

"He is all through with giving consent to your plans."

"I don't like the way you talk," Yig Morrow said petulantly. "I'm not sure that I like you as well as I thought I would." His jealousy of old Daunsog's power and knowledge was always ready to flare. "When did you see him last?"

"Yesterday." Her eyes filled with tears.

Yig Morrow's harshness softened a trifle. "Well, just remember, I'm still Yig Morrow, and he speaks to the people only through me. How do you know but what I talked with him this very morning, and won his approval to my plan?"

Daunsa gave a little cry of bitterness, rose, and walked away. She hurried past the guards and down the spiral way.

Yig stared after her. He ordered his officers to come to him and report what they knew of old Daunsog. A little later in the morning he pieced the story together. Daunsa had buried her father on the desert the previous day. And she might never have returned if she had not met a very unusual stranger along the way who was able to restore her broken faith.

The stranger? He was said to be no other than Berk the Prophet, the very one who had come many years before and planted all the seeds of truth in the mind of the youthful Daunsog.

In utter disbelief Yig Morrow commented, "These tales have no meaning for me until I see this stranger."

"Then look into the plaza," one of the guards said. "See your traitorous

officer Cog, with his arm and head bandaged. And beside him a man in red and black costume. That is Berk the Prophet. See, they're walking over to the Dart of Fire."

CHAPTER X

In the company of Cog, Berk approached the circular platform. This object had been built since his previous visit. The curious structure was unsightly, he thought, marring the looks of the open plaza. An elevated walk led across to it from the palace balcony, and the platform itself was elevated a few feet, so that he might have walked under it if the circular space had not been filled with red-blooming Kessa plants, a mass of green stalks four or five feet high, topped by the ball-shaped blossoms.

The strangeness of the structure was not the circular platform itself, or the mass of flowers beneath it, but the spaceship-shaped monstrosity that towered straight up from the center.

"There it stands, the Dart of Fire," Cog said. "It was built from the description you gave Daunsog."

Berk stared in amazement. It bore resemblance to a space ship in outline only. From its slender cone-shaped point to its base, the sides of rough masonry formed a cylinder. Slender open arches had been built into the base so that a man of full height might have squeezed through. These openings were smoke-blackened, giving the structure the appearance of a one-man pyre - - which, as Cog explained, it virtually was. Burning oils would pour down through it.

"That," said Cog, "is where the chosen ones are burned."

"Why?"

"My own answer is not the popular one. I say it is only for the excitement of Yig Morrow, playing on the religious passions of the people. Call it a sacrifice. Call it a visit to Kessa. It all adds up to murder."

"But - - *why?*"

"They tell us it is based on your words to Daunsog."

"It can't be! *What* words?"

"Shall I repeat them? 'The stream of fire gives one a swift flight out to the vast Beyond, and in flight he may come to know Kessa as never before.' There."

Berk's thoughts spun. He asked for the words again before he was sure. Then he saw it clearly.

"That was my explanation of a *spaceship!*"

Cog shook his head. There was no word for spaceship in his tongue. Dart of Fire was the best he could do. "By whatever name, this is it."

"It's no more a spaceship than a pebble is an egg."

"This isn't an accurate copy, then?"

"You can't begin to know. It would take thousands of years of development before you could possibly know."

This statement, however vague, seemed to give Cog a measure of satisfaction. He had talked with Daunsog himself in the past, and he had grown sure in his own mind that Yig Morrow's interpretation couldn't be the true one. "I could never believe that you meant for the stream of fire to engulf the person and consume his flesh."

"A furnace! A ritual of murder! Out of my words!"

"To the glory of Kessa!" The bitterness of Cog's words brought to Berk's mind the danger before Daunsa.

Berk gazed in silence at the smoke-darkened structure while Cog told of old Daunsog's futile fight against it. Daunsog had been kept out of circulation, virtually imprisoned in a tower in the palace, and plainly his last hope had been that his daughter could run away from it all. He had given his own life in an effort to force her escape across the desert. But the tradition had such a tight grip on her that the sight of "Berk the Prophet" had turned her back, re-

pentant for losing faith. Now she fully expected to go through with the ordeal, Cog was sure.

Berk spoke quietly as they came away. "Neither Daunsa nor anyone else shall enter this trap. You'll help me, of course."

"But how?" Cog glanced at his bandages.

"Not by violence. By reason. We must spread the word. This is all a mistake."

"The belief runs deep," Cog declared. "Yig Morrow is strong. He would murder a prophet sooner than see the light."

"His eyes might be made to open. Suppose it were to happen to him?"

"It happens only to beautiful females. He has turned it into a ritual of private lust. Each chosen one is granted a day of marriage to him before the fires flow."

They walked a wide circle around the plaza, avoiding the little huddles of curious citizens who had gathered for a glimpse of Berk. The news of his coming and of his miracle in bringing Cog out of a strangely frozen state of death was spreading across the city. Berk hardly noticed the onlookers; through Cog's counsel he meant to find a key to the dilemma. Cog was sure this mountain of superstition couldn't be cut away with reason. It would take more.

"Then here is our answer," Berk said finally. "We shall pretend to approve the ceremony. But we will go a step further and approve it not only for women but for men. That is what I have come to say. I, Berk the Prophet, declare that the god Kessa now wishes a man to be sacrificed, not a woman."

Cog scowled, trying to foresee the consequences.

Berk went on. "Set these wheels in motion for me, Cog. Let this idea be established in all minds throughout the city. That is my mission. The god Kessa has sent me to say that he would be pleased to receive some noble man such as Yig Morrow himself, no less!"

Cog continued to withhold his thoughts. Perhaps, Berk thought, he was disillusioned to see a prophet turn to scheming. Fearing this, Berk tried to back away from his rash idea. "Get word to Yig Morrow that I wish to meet him. If he will listen to reason - - "

"He won't."

"We'll try. Tell him I have come, in all humility, with messages for him from Beyond."

CHAPTER XI

Berk awakened in the middle of the night, haunted by nightmares of victims being burned to ashes in the name of Kessa. He walked along the path from the cave to the spring, a little distance down the slope. For half an hour he sat, gazing across the city to the mists of the silent moonlit sea. The city was sleeping. There were no lights except the three or four torches that glowed dimly from the gates of the palace. Berk had had no word from Yig Morrow. He had not been asked to come to this world. Coming, he had not been welcomed by its ruler.

He looked down on the sleeping city and thought timeless thoughts. Centuries would come and go, and it would remain the same, steeped in moonlight by night, kissed by the breezes of a calm sea, fragrant with the rich smells of the Kessa flowers.

What had Berk to do with this world? His imprint had been left before, only to be twisted into something hideous. Now his friend Daunsog was gone - - his only tie to this people.

Yet there was Daunsog's beautiful daughter . . .

Berk walked back to the mouth of the cave.

She was there, sleeping. Her graceful fingers covered her eyes against the orange light of the skies. The moon's cast overlapping shadows through the filmy scarf that she had drawn over her body for a night covering.

Near her, lying about on beds of grass,

were the ill persons she was looking after, now lost in sleep. She had had enough faith in Berk to bring them to him. He was not a doctor. Nevertheless his knowledge in such matters was far superior to their own. His chosen headquarters, the open cave, was rapidly becoming a sanctuary for people needing care; and Daunsa had watched and helped.

Why should he care about them?

But Daunsa - - he *did* care about her, there was no denying that.

He knelt near her. His hand touched the strands of dark hair that lay across her shoulder. Her arm moved slightly.

Gazing at her, he pictured himself carrying her across the quiet desert back to his waiting spaceship.

How unfair would it be if he took direct action to get her out of this world? He would only need to touch the trigger of his ray pistol; a paralysis would seize her; no one would hear; he could carry her lightly.

Would she not thank him later?

He thought of the Dart of Fire, waiting.

He took the pistol in his hand, aimed, waited, thinking. For minutes he debated. It was easy to say that his way would be best. But what - - exactly what - - was in her heart?

She moved. Her fingers slid from her eyes. She awakened, looked up into Berk's face and smiled. His hand went back to his side and the pistol was put away.

"Why are you looking at me?" she whispered sleepily.

"Daunsa, I want you to promise me something."

"Yes?"

"That you will have faith in me. If I take you away - - to other lands - - don't be angry. It will be for your own good."

"You mean - - the *Beyond?*"

"Yes - - to lands known only to Kessa."

The girl looked dreamily at the starry sky. "I am going, of course. The Dart of Fire will take me."

"Not the Dart of the plaza, but my own, somewhere across the desert - - a dart that really moves through the sky, just as a boat moves on the sea, and carries you without harm. Daunsa, believe me, the one on the plaza is false - - your father knew it; Cog knows it, and so do I. It takes you nowhere. It is a trap of final death."

With a look of shock in her dark eyes, she faced Berk. "No. No. You are telling me this to try my faith. But I have no fear. I'll go. Before the eyes of the people, I'll go."

"Your father tried to tell you, didn't he?"

"But he was only putting my faith to a test. I've thought about it constantly since he died, and I'm sure - - "

"No, Daunsa, he was sincere. It's not a route to Kessa. It's only a death trap that Yig Morrow uses to excite everyone, especially himself. You mustn't fall victim."

The girl lay back and closed her eyes. She drew the filmy scarf closely over her breasts. She spoke softly. "I want to believe you, Berk, for I know you are the prophet who came to my father. But I must do what is right in the eyes of my people."

She looked full into his eyes. He bent close to her. "Come with me now, Daunsa. Forsake this world and travel to a new one. Be my bride. Let me take you to the Beyond. Whatever the name of the god that you call Kessa, the powers of that god shall be known to you as never before if you come with me. This city by the sea is only a speck in the vast universe of space. These people are only a breath of the life that exists on uncounted planets across the sky. With your own beautiful eyes you'll see things you never dreamed of. Come with me. Now."

"I couldn't be your bride, Berk. You

are a prophet. Besides, it's my duty to become the bride of Yig Morrow."

"And die!" Berk's voice wanted to roar with anger. "Who says it is your duty to do anything so stupid?"

"The Dart of Fire was built, Berk, because of things you once said. That was the start. The beliefs have deepened - - "

"Deepened! They've twisted into murder!"

She gazed at him in silence, and he knew that his show of anger had shocked her.

"I'm sorry," he said. "You have lots to do, looking after these ill ones. You'd better go back to sleep."

"Thank you." She slipped her graceful fingers over her eyes and said no mere.

Berk climbed over the ridge of mountain and walked a little distance out onto the desert. Exhausted in spirit, he dropped down and slept. His coming to this land had been a misguided venture, a complete failure. Tomorrow he would leave.

CHAPTER XII

With the coming of dawn he repeated his resolve: Tomorrow he would leave - - tomorrow or the next day. But today there were things to be done. Already Daunsa was taking care of the ill ones, and already a new group appeared, needing a touch of care.

"The Prophet Berk has the wisdom to make you well again," the girl could be heard saying.

Tomorrow and another tomorrow. The cave of Berk the Prophet turned away no one.

From all parts of the city people came to him, as the busy days went on. Fishermen learned new tricks in the making of nets. Gardeners were told how to improve their crops. Religious zealots came merely to look at him out of eyes of wonderment; and to each he gave some wisp of instruction for a better life.

Cog was often with him as well as Daunsa. They listened like children, drinking in the words of wisdom he spoke. But whatever he said was first sifted through the sieve of caution. He was constantly aware that gems of wisdom he had left with Daunsog, only two generations before, had been misshapen into weird and often dangerous half-truths.

Then came the epidemic, and Berk was put to a severe test.

If this man is indeed the Prophet Berk, let him put an end to this wave of illness. Those were the challenging words from the palace that reached Berk's ears one morning as he walked along the path above the city.

He proceeded cautiously. He studied the directions of the capricious winds that played through the horseshoe-shaped city. Was one section of the town more affected by illness than another?

"Bring me a Kessa flower," he asked one of the natives who had followed him.

The flower was brought to him. The native apologized for picking it. No one liked to disturb the Kessa flowers. Their name surrounded them with sacred superstitions.

Berk examined the blossom under a glass for many hours. The plant itself was a rank growth of stalk with leaves like a corn plant. The blossom was globe-shaped, larger than one's cupped hands - - almost as large as the human head. It was lighter than a ball of cork, and the gauze-like petals which curved out from its surface were like tongues of red fire. It was a miniature sun with swirling coronas, and when plucked it would float about like thistle-down.

Not until Berk had sketched a map of the city and spotted on it the areas of the epidemic did he stumble upon the clue. At first he had thought it must be the presence of the flower itself. He had once questioned whether it

might be the brilliance of its color; and again, the reed-like song that came from it at times had caused him to wonder whether the epidemic might somehow be a tone-sickness.

But in the end, what Berk discovered was something quite different. Not the plants themselves, but the gray gull-like birds that flew in from the sea to feed upon the blossoms, were the source of the epidemic.

The birds were pests. They came in with certain winds, they fed only in certain areas of the town. It was believed by the fishermen that their condition of life was affected by floods in some remote part of the planet. To say the least, they had become an unclean breed, and uncleanliness was at the root of the epidemic.

"Get rid of the gray birds!" Berk ordered. "Kill them off. Drive them off. Keep your yards clean. If necessary, get rid of the Kessa flowers that attract them."

The afflicted natives gladly complied. And the epidemic was stamped out. Words of praise for Berk the Prophet warmed the city like a kindly sun. And on every street corner one might hear rumors of Yig Morrow's consternation.

Then the call came from the palace.

"Yig Morrow, the ruler of this land," said the messenger to Berk, "would like for you to come to the balcony. He wishes to see you."

CHAPTER XIII

All the way up the spiral ascent, Berk whispered to himself his rehearsed facts. Let Yig Morrow just try to doubt that he was Berk the Prophet!

But Yig's first word of greeting was disarming. "To the honored prophet of Kessa I extend a respectful welcome." He beckoned to a servant. "Please seat our honored guest at my table and bring food and drink."

Berk caught his own reflection in the polished black marble wall as he was being seated. He was clean-shaven, and his red and black military uniform had been given the best possible brightening by friends who attended him at his cave-home. The small black-and-white pistol might have been only an ornament; it would mean no more to Yig Morrow than the insignia of travel on his coat. Yig, indeed, seemed hardly to see Berk at all, during the first part of their feast, for his eyes had a habit of lifting toward the clouds or following the course of flying birds

He was like a bird himself, Berk thought. The feathered cape that spread outward in wing-like points from his massive shoulders gave a rustling sound whenever he moved. The feathers of natural gray made Berk think of the recent epidemic. Yet there was nothing unclean or repulsive in Yig Morrow's appearance. His wide face possessed a certain strength; the deepset topaz eyes betrayed a depth of feeling.

Three times during Yig Morrow's low, brittle monolog about bits of nothing - - the sea - - the habits of birds - - the distant earthquakes - - he stopped as if listening to a signal. Soon Berk knew what it was. The sounds of faint music from the Kessa flowers. A breeze was rising, shifting directions. The flowers began to sing.

"I remember that song from my previous visit," Berk said.

"Not *that* song. Every song is a little different."

"The music of Kessa flowers must add much beauty to the life of your people."

"Beauty - - yes. Fears also. There is an urgency about this song that I find most compelling. Hear it?"

The weird notes ascended an irregular scale, growing faster and sharper with each ascent, breaking off with an unfinished effect. *Thong! . . . Thang! . . . Thaing! . . . Thine! Thine Thin! Thin-thin-thin-theeeen! . . .* A moment of silence, then again. A little faster, a little sharper, over and over. Now in

the distance, now near at hand, now distant again

"That noise!" Yig rose, looked at the sea and the darkening sky. "I was going to ask you many questions, but that noise!"

"I can talk against it," Berk said casually. "Sit down."

"No, it disturbs me. That note of urgency. If you had the power to stop it - - but you don't, of course."

Berk caught his questioning eye. Did he seriously wonder if Berk had power over the winds and the waves? What a nervous one he was. A gust fluttered his winged shoulders. Another gust, the whine of flowers, the wail, the shriek, then weird silence again. Yig Morrow pushed his chair aside.

"Come. The song tells us to hurry. The wedding can wait."

"What wedding?" Berk asked.

"Daunsa and I."

"When?"

"I can't talk here. Come. There's a quieter room inside." He motioned Berk to follow. "Here. Now - - "

Messengers kept interrupting to report growing crowds. Trouble was moving toward the palace with the darkness. Berk saw through hall mirrors the reflections of moving torchlights. Down the long slopes toward the plaza. It was time, in the language of Kessa. The god was telling them. The wail of the Kessa flowers. It was time.

Berk tried to read Morrow's frenzied gestures. The wings of the feathered costume quivered like a trembling heart. Abrupt words. The ruler was probing for Berk's inner thoughts. How much power did Berk have? What was the basis of his beliefs? Yig Morrow needed to know - - quickly. The time was at hand. These wailing flowers - -

"You say you came from the sky. Yet you claim to understand my people. You have stirred them to the point of revolt. You accuse me of cruelty. Here. Sit here, Prophet Berk." Were his courtesies sincere? And his questions? "Sit here and repeat - - "

Berk thought, We're being overheard. Repeat - - *for whom?* He saw Yig glance to a purple screen that separated the adjoining room. A guard near the doorway gave Yig a slight nod, and Yig said to Berk, "Repeat what you said about the Dart of Fire."

Berk said crisply, "It's all evil. *Destroy it!*"

"But you're only taunting." Yig Morrow searched his eyes.

"*Destroy it, Yig Morrow, or I will destroy it myself!*"

"It was formed out of your own words."

"My words were twisted. It provides a hideous death, nothing more."

"But old Daunsog told us - - "

"You misunderstood "

Yig glowered. "Old Daunsog's daughter would not like to hear such blasphemies."

Then Berk knew who was back of the purple screen. Daunsa. Had she been brought here against her will? Why? Because revolt was in the air? Yig Morrow was keen enough to hope he could use her as a weapon to turn the tide. And perhaps to use Berk for the same purpose? Berk lashed out with sharp words:

"The people will destroy you, Yig Morrow. I've taught them true ways. With the help of Daunsa and Cog I've cured their illnesses. They're hungry for truth. On this night they'll learn that your ritual of fire is a sham."

Yig stared hard at Berk. "You think they'll believe you? No. If you try to kill this ritual, they'll turn on you, not me Even Daunsa. You'll see."

Coldness struck through Berk's nerves. Even Daunsa? He had not forgotten - -

A servant interrupted. The oncoming crowds were bringing stones to hurl at the palace. Should the guards turn them back with spears at once?

Yig's face went white with rage. His shoulders fluttered as he whirled. "I'll face them. Tell them I'll address them from the Dart of Fire. The fire is ready.

Kessa will be appeased."

The messenger left. Berk seized his advantage. "If you want to save yourself, Yig Morrow, confess your mistake in the name of Kessa. Set this city free from your murderous lie."

"It's not a lie. The Dart of Fire is the true glory."

"You don't believe that."

"I do!"

Then Berk's anger unleashed a bitter challenge. "True glory! And the victim - - always a beautiful woman - - *after* your passion is spent!"

Yig's voice was edged with a taunt. "Is the prophet jealous of our gifts to Kessa? Then let me surprise you. This time the victim, as you say it, shall be a man. I'll make that much concession to the clamor of the people." And Yig turned sharply to the guard near the purple screen. "Has Cog been captured? . . . Conduct him to the Dart of Fire. The ceremony will proceed at once."

Then it was that the girl's voice sounded an outcry. The screen fell forward, and Daunsa forced her way past the guard, toward Yig Morrow and Berk. An outraged, sobbing plea, over and over. *"No, not Cog! No, not Cog! No! . . ."*

Then she stopped, touching her tear-filled eyes. A look from Berk must have given her strength. She recovered her composure. It was not good for a girl of such queenly beauty to plead with tears. She moved backward a step, then stood, calm and proud, facing the two of them.

Berk saw that she was wearing a bridal costume. The sight of her had caused his heart to skip a beat. Her mass of dark hair was thrown to one side, caught in loops of beaded jewels. Her brief costume had been designed from the petals of a Kessa flower. Narrow ribbons of gold clung to her body, revealing the magic beauty of her curves, the fullness of her breasts. Berk thought, Kessa! - - If Kessa was indeed an all-seeing, all-knowing god - - Kessa must have been proud of this creation.

Now in quiet dignity Daunsa repeated, "No, Yig Morrow, you will not take Cog - - "

"I am honoring him, don't you see?" The ruler's eyes glittered. "This proves that I forgive him."

"If he goes, I go with him," the girl said quietly.

"I have other honors planned for you." Yig moved a step toward her. "When the fire ceremony is over, you are to have my love - - in the name of Kessa."

CHAPTER XIV

The clamoring crowd hushed expectantly as the party crossed the torch-lighted bridge from the palace to the Dart platform. A squad of twelve guards with spears accompanied the regal march. The breeze stilled. The Kessa flowers went silent.

Berk walked close beside Daunsa, whispering tensely. "Have you forgotten that I asked you to come away with me to the worlds beyond?"

"I could never do it," she answered softly.

"I'll not let you go into the flame with Cog."

"If he goes, I'll go with him. I could not bear to see him go alone."

"He will not go alone. He will not go."

His words were answered with the strange light of hurt in her eyes. "You are beyond understanding, Prophet Berk. Even Yig Morrow is ready to offer him the honor - - "

"You still believe? This is terrifying, Daunsa." Then he was pleading with her hoarsely against the sounds of their marching. "Daunsa, I love you. You remember my bond with your father. But this is more. If I leave this land alone, my heart will always be torn by love for you. Come with me, Daunsa, while there's still time."

"I have dreamed it, Berk."

"Then come."

"But always in my dream you loomed

above me as a prophet. I could never be free to share myself . . . I am sorry."

"It is Cog you love, then?"

"Yes." Her eyes shone. Whatever might happen, she seemed relieved that she had been able to say these words.

Now they reached the end of the bridge. Berk hardly saw the dark towering Dart of Fire that rose from the center of the platform. His step had grown heavy. He thought of his ship waiting somewhere across the dark desert. Around him the threatening voices of the multitude were like something out of a dream. Yet as real, he knew, as a savage beast that turns upon its master. Had Yig Morrow's cruelties run their course? This sullen crowd held the answer.

The squad of guards stood back. Yig Morrow stepped forward to the rail of the circular platform, his face highlighted by the glow of torches. He motioned Daunsa and Berk to stand beside him. This was his strategy to quell the public anger: make them believe there was no clash between ruler and prophet.

Yig began to speak. He made friendly gestures toward both Daunsa and Berk. Berk listened, his thoughts whirling. What chance had anyone against the power of the deep-rooted ritual? The smell of cool, soot-blackened stones was in his nostrils. Would he see the Dart of Fire in full blaze on this night? How could he make these simple people believe the truth? He had not even been able to convince Daunsa! Why try to sway the others? The ritual would go on, down through the ages, growing more sacred, no doubt, and gathering added cruelty. But of one thing Berk was sure. Tonight, whoever the victim might be, he would be spared the worst by the instantaneous touch of death from Berk's pistol . . . and no one would know.

Yig Morrow's speech ended. The crowd went into an uproar. At first Berk, lost in his own thoughts, didn't realize what was happening. Then he saw: It was Cog! Cog was being forced to the platform by the points of spears.

Berk saw the flash of defiance in Cog's face, a look that recalled the night on the desert. Daunsa ran to his side

"If you go, I go." Daunsa clung to him. The crowd's murmurs told that they were stirred with deep feelings. How deep? How intent upon saving Cog and Daunsa? Berk wondered. Sixty or more uniformed guards stood in formation around the platform on the ground level, twelve feet below the rail. They gripped their spears, looking sharp for trouble. Berk looked down on them and wondered whether they could suppress mob violence.

Cog was ordered to enter the Dart of Fire. He didn't move. He and Daunsa clung to each other. The dozen guards on the platform advanced. But the shouting from the crowd suddenly caught everyone's attention, even that of Yig Morrow and the guards.

"Let Berk speak!" "Let the prophet be heard." "Is this the will of Kessa?" "Speak, Berk!"

Yig Morrow yelled back at them harshly. "The Prophet Berk agrees with me . . . He approves - - " Yig's voice was tense. He was losing control. Then Berk himself, outraged by this lie, broke in and shouted in a voice that rang across the plaza:

"If Kessa must be honored by fire, let him be honored by the one who insists! I command Yig Morrow to enter the Dart of Fire and be delivered in smoke!"

The wild cries that greeted this command fairly rocked the mountainside.

Yig Morrow roared. *"No! No! That was not the plan!"* The crowd shouted him down. Yig waved for silence, but it was Berk who again caught the audience with his ringing voice:

"Listen to me. Before anyone goes into this furnace of death, let me tell

you what the god Kessa would have you know. This device was not my wish. It was an accident of misunderstanding. My words were twisted into something false. You have never heard of a *spaceship*. You have no word for it. It is a marvel of invention. It rides through the skies. Someday you will know. Your children's children may travel in *spaceships* someday. They will ride, unharmed, with the speed of sunbeams - - ride, and return again - - and no breath of the *spaceship's* fire will ever touch them. But this poor tower of stone. It is no more a *spaceship* than Yig Morrow is a bird. It has only a little of the shape, but none of the reality. It is only a mockery. A furnace. And if you would look under the grate of this furnace, what would you find?"

The crowd waited, hushed. Berk commanded one of the guards on the ground below to walk under the platform, through the mass of Kessa flowers and see what he found in the center. The guard returned to give the dire answer. Charred bones.

"The guard finds beneath the grate the bones - - the burned bones of the victims." Berk repeated these words to the listening multitude. "Those remains tell you the true story. An honor to Kessa? No, a trick of misunderstanding. Those honored ones were burned alive — *and Yig Morrow knew it!*"

Indignation thundered across the plaza.

Yig Morrow, whose face was chalky in the torchlight, flailed the air with his arms. "I did not know it. I do not believe it! *I deny - -* "

"The bones are there to prove - - "

"*I DENY - -* "

"Then step into the Dart of Fire yourself, if you think your own flesh will not be consumed."

"I will! I will. I defy all of you. I defy Kessa himself!"

"Careful! Consider well - - "

"Let it happen!" Yig Morrow shouted in white fury. "Let it happen! I will go to Kessa. I'll prove you a false prophet, and then these people will know. They'll grind you to dust under their heels. And I'll laugh at you from the skies - - "

His words were lost in the pandemonium, the cries of excited people, the rising winds, the sudden scream of flowers. Amid the noise he walked to the center of the platform, stepped into the blackened entrance of the Dart. He waved his arms, defying the fire to consume him. He cried his command to a guard on the ground below. The guard hurled a lighted Kessa flower into the air from the point of his spear. It missed the top of the dart and floated off, burning out. A second missed. A third went true.

The blazing globe of flower touched a stream of oil near the top.

"Let the fires come down!" Yig's voice sounded weirdly from the hollow cylindrical furnace. "Pull the cords! Let the fires come down!"

A guard pulled a cable. A line of blaze spilled down. The first flame caught one tip of Yig's winged shoulder with an audible *floosh!* The feathers burst into flame.

Yig's roar changed to a shriek of fear. He rushed out of the Dart, just ahead of the full flame that would have baptized him. He threw off the burning costume as he came. He ran at Berk. The blinding light of fire, roaring up through the masonry, threw Berk momentarily off guard.

"Look out!" The shout of Cog. Berk barely dodged as Yig went by him, arm upraised, knife in hand.

The guards were rushing to get back out of the wave of heat. Yig, however, rounded the platform, shouting orders at the forces on the ground below. "Come on with those spears! Get the prophet first. Then Cog - - hurry! Cut him down. Stay back, the rest of you. Don't let the crowd rush you - - "

Around the rail he ran. Berk followed him. On the second round Yig stopped. To his consternation the guards below were not moving. They stood cold in their tracks, spears uplifted, motionless. The invisible ray from Berk's pistol had made temporary stone of them.

Yig couldn't get a motion out of them, for all his shouting. He bellowed like a wounded beast, then turned back upon Berk, charged at him with the knife - - *and ran into the paralysis ray.* His muscles went rigid. The momentum carried him over the rail when Berk sidestepped him. He fell upon one of the upraised spears. There he hung, motionless, obviously without any feeling. He would never know that a spear had plunged through his heart. The frozen guard who had caught him wobbled off balance, and together they crashed to the ground.

The long hush. The voice of Berk. "*Kessa have mercy!*"

* * *

The multitude across the plaza repeated the words of loyalty to Cog and Daunsa. They sang softly a song that applauded their two new leaders.

Now the Dart of Fire had been destroyed with the stones that might have been hurled against the palace. The Kessa flowers barely murmured, and a faint column of smoke, visible by the light of three moons, was all that remained of the fire. Yet most of the crowd still lingered, watching, wondering, whispering "Do you see the image in the smoke?" they asked each other "It's old Daunsog himself . . . Plain as day. See, he's smiling to them - - Cog and Daunsa He has his hands on their shoulders. *She* sees. Her hands are reaching up to him . . . It's a vision . . . Now it's fading."

"Now it's fading," Berk repeated to himself, watching languidly. Then at the last he saw not Daunsog the man, but Daunsog the boy, the same as he had been years ago. The little fellow seemed to be waving a hand of farewell to Berk. . . . And this was the image that lingered in Berk's eyes as he walked alone through the desert dawn, across the miles of sand to his spaceship.

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6. Opening date: July 1st. Closing date: December 31st, 1956

7. Send all submissions to John Mussells, 4 Curve Street, Wakefield, Mass.

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12. There is no time-limit for stories sent back for revision, except the limit of the contest - - - December 31st, 1956.

13. The decision of the Judges is final.

LETTERS

In order to make a report on our recent campaign to have a successor to Edgar Rice Burroughs named, we will make use of the "Letters" section. And if the letters grow quite lengthy, please forgive us this once, because we believe you will be vitally interested in everything that has gone on - - and in learning our plans for the future. We present first, a letter from Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc., written to your editor:

Gentlemen:

Our attention has been called to your bi-monthly publication, OTHER WORLDS, which occasionally has featured the name and or character of TARZAN, the Edgar Rice Burroughs name, TARZAN articles, etc.

This is to inform you that the TARZAN name and character is a registered trade mark, and the TARZAN material is copyrighted.

The indiscriminate use thereof by anyone without the consent or permission of this Corporation is in violation of the law. Our files do not indicate that we have ever had any request from you for the use to which you have put the TARZAN name and material; and we respectfully request, therefore, that henceforth you cease using this name and material unless you have first secured our permission to do so.

Yours very truly,
EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS, INC.
C. R. Rothmund, General Manager

It is true that TARZAN is a registered trademark. So is WHEATIES. We happen to like them both. If the supply of WHEATIES were cut off, we would be compelled to use the word WHEATIES in requesting their renewed supply, and if the WHEATIES company ignored our many letters, refused to grant us an interview, and returned our "manuscript" unread, we would probably try to ask other people to support our request, and by weight of public opinion, get a definite answer, one way or another. Of course we'd have to refer to WHEATIES to let our fellow men know what we were talking about. How would we ask TARZAN fans to back up a request for new TARZAN stories without mentioning the name? That is the sense in which we used the name TARZAN. However, we have desisted from using it except in this public letter column which is contributed to by TARZAN fans, who cannot be kept from swinging through trees and shouting "Yeah! TARZAN!" And, as one of them, your editor also shouts, "We want TARZAN!" But are we going to get him? Read on and see.

Dear Ray:

I dropped a line to the ERB interests, and the reply I'm forwarding to you. Realize that as a subscriber I probably receive *Other Worlds* ahead of the newsstand, (can't really tell, for while I was in service all stf disappeared from the local stand) and as such was probably one of the first to write. However, the reply seems to indicate that no permission will be granted. Incidentally, have again written Mr. Rothmund, urging him to consider a successor even if it isn't Byrne.

If the Bloodstone yarn cannot be used as intended, perhaps you can get the use of Howard Browne's character Tharn for the leading character. How you'd work in the past history for the Martian angle is a little beyond me, but suppose it can be done.

Herbert C. Beach
210 West Paquin
Waterville, Minn.

Dear Mr. Beach:

We have your letter of April 26. We have had only two or three letters similar to this concerning Mr. Bloodstone. Unfortunately, he is unsatisfactory to us.

As to the manuscript, 'Tarzan on Mars,' we regret to tell you that we shall never permit it to be published. The story is not even interesting.

We appreciate your writing to us, and thank you for your interest in the Edgar Rice Burroughs stories.

Yours very truly,
EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS, INC.
C. R. Rothmund General Manager

For a few days Mr. Rothmund sent

similar letters to everyone who wrote in, and these were forwarded to us. We print only one, because that's all that is necessary. The answer is pretty definite - - nothing doing. No TARZAN, and especially no Bloodstone. (Byrne). Mr. Rothmund considers the story "not even interesting", which is indeed an interesting observance, because HE DID NOT READ IT! Mr. Bloodstone is "unsatisfactory", and we can easily see why - - he was REFUSED AN INTERVIEW. To say we are surprised at this reaction is putting it mildly. ERB himself, when receiving a fan letter requesting anything at all, would have been not only polite, but cordial to the extreme. We received a very different reaction from Mrs. John Coleman Burroughs (ERB's daughter-in-law), who is a subscriber to OW. She renewed her subscription! She likes to read OW, and would like to read TARZAN in it. But then, she's only a fan like the rest of us. However, when ERB died, John Coleman, wishing to save himself from the deluge of opportunists, business propositions, and the general drudgery of managing a really great fiction empire (Tarzana, California is named after it!), gave Mr. Rothmund full control. Thus, since TARZAN is in the movies, on TV, and on assorted boxtops, comics, etc., the income is tremendous, and all without turning a hand. Mr. Rothmund is quite satisfied with the income, which apparently is the only consideration he has. That the novel and book and of it is not at all covered today, is not of interest to him, because profits from this, considering the effort involved, would not be too substantial. All of which leaves us more serious-minded fans (to whom the comic treatment of TARZAN is at least inadequate and much too juvenile; and the Movie and TV treatment even more lacking in what the original books contained) completely out in the cold. Whitman Publishing Company still puts out an occasional TARZAN story in book form, but as Mr. Rothmund says "the story is not even interesting", and the one we read caused us to shudder at the desecration to ERB's memory that it represents. ERB's wastebasket never contained anything that bad!

We don't know how many letters Mr. Rothmund actually got from our readers, but we have two large packing cases full! We intended to send them to Rothmund, as part of the evidence that here was a market for TARZAN he could exploit. Now we intend to keep them, for a purpose. This purpose is inspired by Mr. Rothmund's statement that "the manuscript" is something he will never permit to be published. Here he is dead wrong. "The manuscript" WILL be published. Not TARZAN ON MARS, of course, but the manuscript, *will be published, word for word, with the exception of trademarked and copyrighted names, places, etc. This story is too good to remain unpublished. So, right now, let's forget about TARZAN. To us book-lover fans, he is dead. Rothmund has killed him; something even the King of Beasts could not do!*

And now, as Herbert Beach has pointed out, "working in the past history of the Martian (not a trademarked word) angle is a little beyond me, but I suppose it can be done." Well, Bloodstone and your editor thought of this, and we had the answer long before we even began the campaign. You readers are learning only now that there are SIX novels blueprinted to provide exactly that "Martian angle", and to provide a plot basis leading up to the TERRIFIC novel Mr. Bloodstone wrote as a labor of love, which received such an unlovely reception. Naturally he does not call this novel by any trademarked name any longer. It has a new title, a new character, but other than that, it remains identical. And herein commences a new era in science fiction. We freely predict that John Bloodstone, or Stuart J. Byrne, which is his real name, will present to you, in the coming years, a series of novels which will not make you forget the great ERB, of course, but which will cause you to place him right up there on the same pedestal!
.... Rap.

Dear Ray:

Just read your editorial in the April issue of O.W. Who in hell is Joe Gibson? You say he is an author. Maybe so, but lucky me! I've never read any of his 'hard headed common sense' stories, and if that's his idea of Tarzan, I don't want to. Maybe he is just irked because Burroughs still outsells the works of any author in the business. His books are still in print and being sold in various editions all over the world. Reprint editions are available here in the U. S. in G & D Whitman, and ERB, Inc., edi-

tions. In England, Methuen reprints the Tarzan and Martian series in hard covers while W. H. Allen reprints almost all of ERB's works in pocket editions New reprints are available in France, Germany, Denmark, Holland, Norway, Spain, Mexico and South America. Japan is reprinting the books in beautiful illustrated, boxed editions. Israel and the Arabs at least agree when it comes to Tarzan, with the novels translated and reprinted constantly. This world-wide popularity does not seem a "small minority" to me. Science-fiction should have such a "small minority" of readers.

Well, you told Gibson off nicely, Ray, but . . . there was one remark you overlooked. This loud-mouth, Gibson, insinuated that Burroughs fans are a "mentally unhealthy" group on the "lunatic fringe", who're fearful of grabbing the world by its "very real set of horns." Now, if this bird wants to be insulting, he had best be prepared to suffer the consequence. My BB mailing list is over a thousand, and I hear regularly from hundreds of Burroughs fans. I've met dozens of them, all types and ages - - doctors, lawyers, authors, artists, laborers, clerks, and even an Indian-chief writer. All of them, from just plain fans to the fourteen-year-old sons of ex-editors, are a fine, up-standing group of wonderful people And I've yet to meet the ERB fan who's afraid to grab the world by its set of horns, especially the Indian chief. You don't judge a book by its cover, even if it is a Bok, Finlay, or Paul, so don't judge people by their tastes, be it wine, women or song. Just because a person can enjoy reading and relaxing with a Tarzan novel is no reason to think that person is afraid of the world, anymore than the one who finds enjoyment in a detective, western, science-fantasy or Shakespearean story. I suppose relaxing could be called an escape from realism. Most persons have a way to escape or relax, be it with a book, in a theatre, listening to music, or enjoying a good smoke or drink . . . and some just plain go to bed. Joe has such a retreat of some sort . . . most normal people have - - - or is everybody in the world "looney" *except* you, Joseph? I may not like everything you like, Joe, but there may be something you like that I do also. However, I see no reason for you to get insulting just because you think you can write better than ERB! And explain to me, brain boy, how relaxing can be mentally unhealthy. You say ERB fans are afraid of the world and life. I say you are completely mistaken. My friends and fellow-Burroughs fans are *not* on the lunatic fringe. They are a group of swell people who get a bang out of life and Tarzan and to whom I think you owe an apology . . . and if they don't receive it, I may just prove to you how looney I am, rip off my clothing, don my loin cloth and pay you a not too friendly visit. Since I might be called the number one Burroughs fan in this country, I'm taking your remarks personally, and believe me, as much as I love ERB and his works, I'm certainly not afraid of the world and I'll take it and Joe Gibson by their "Very real set" anytime. You, Gibby, are the one who is on the "border". In fact, boy, you sound like you've crossed over.

I know another Gibson. I used to admire the way he would do in a band of cattle rustlers, taking on 10 or 20 single-handed with a grin on his face and never re-loading his six-gun. When I was a kid, I enjoyed that hour of Western fantasy, when they used six-guns instead of gee-tars. Later in life I met the man. In reality he was a two-fisted, hard-riding, hard-drinking, bronc-busting world champion cowboy (1st prize-winner of the Calgary Stampede rodeo) who had a unique way of pitching pennies. I still admire this Gibson, the real one, but I also can and do enjoy the unreal Gibson, on the TV re-runs, who never says "damn" or drinks anything stronger than "sasparilla." It is very possible to relax and enjoy the unreal, yet live and admire the real. ERB, Tarzan's creator, had a great zest for life, and he lived it to the hilt. His life was full of adventure, from the time he was a member of the Seventh Cavalry against Geronimo, to being the oldest War Correspondent in World War Two. Yet, this did not stop him from writing wonderful fantasy and satire for his own enjoyment and that of his countless fans. ERB loved life and hated death, but he feared neither. He spat in the eye of death, and fought him to the very end

As for myself, I've no doubt that I've *lived* a much fuller and varied life than Joe Gibson. I received my education from life; Gibby, ole thing - - and I've had the world by the horns many times,

and been stuck by said horns just as often. But I can still (even at my advanced age) out-live, out-run, out-jump, out-drink, out-fight and out (naughty word) one Joe Gibson any day, any time . . . You can believe that, Joseph.

Tarzan is a gallant character most men would like to emulate *if it were possible*. Tarzan, when found with another man's wife in his arms, was challenged by the supposedly outraged husband to a duel. Came the dawn of the duel and the Apeman, smilingly, received the slugs from his foe's pistol in his body (fortunately none of them struck Tarzan between the eyes). The pistol fell from the trembling hand of the astonished husband and Tarzan calmly explained to him that he had made a mistake re his wife's fidelity (see Return of Tarzan). I loved that scene. It is romantic and rather wonderful, if unrealistic. But liking a thing does not mean I'll react the same under similar conditions. For instance, Joseph, suppose you caught me with your spouse in my arms, (impossible, of course). Realistically, I'd probably give you a sound pounding for interrupting.

As you can gather, Joe, I don't think you know what you are talking about and totally disagree with your idea of Tarzan and Tarzan fans. You want to give us a Tarzan who uses four-letter words and goes about doing four-letter deeds. Well, I hope he does them to you first. There is a time and a place for everything, including s-e-x and four letter words, but it's not in Tarzan books. Your ideas of Tarzan belong in a Mickey Spillane jungle. I suggest you go back to writing the scripts for eight-page comic books and keep your nose where it belongs . . . and no more insulting remarks, or you may find yourself gaining fame as the only eunuch in fandom. Furthermore, if you don't heed this, I'll send my pal, Randy Garrett, up there to take you by the ear and give you a new set of brains.

Believe it, boy!

Vernell W. Coriell
P. O. Box 652
Pekin, Illinois

P.S. If my remarks gall you, it's no more than you deserve. I can be as nasty as you can. I've no intention of bandying words back and forth in a letter column with you. I think you get a charge out of sounding off in that manner. But you can drop down and we'll argue about it. It's only two hours and forty minutes on the Rocket. But I'll win the argument, cause what I might lack in brain-power, I make up for in manpower. I got a lotta backing there . . . or, I get up to Chicago now and then, enroute to visit that wonderful artist of Tarzan's fame, St. John. This grand gentleman could give you a few lessons in *life* and how to live it!

Well, here's a letter from the number 1 TARZAN fan. He runs a club of more than 1000 TARZAN fans. He knew ERB personally, also J. Allen St. John (which honor your editor also has, as he counts St. John one of his firmest science fiction friends, and a greater stf artist never lived!) He speaks for TARZAN fans everywhere, and in our opinion, Joe Gibson has no words left to bandy—if he wished to. - - Rap.

Dear Rap:

Before me are my few back-issues of Palmer magazines along with the June OTHER WORLDS. I always thought that those issues contained some of the greatest sf novels ever published. Well, was I wrong! Roger Arcot's novel, "The Timeless Man" is beyond any doubt the greatest sf novel I have ever had the pleasure of reading. Words fail me in describing how much I enjoyed "The Timeless Man."

Now, let us not forget Williams' excellent, "The Grove of God." That was a short masterpiece of science fiction by itself. It has one of the most original ideas since Sam Mines', "To Find The Sculptor" (most recently reprinted in WONDER STORY ANNUAL).

The other story, "The Steogar" by Russell Storm was a better than average story, but not one-fourth as good as "The Grove Of God". (Wait - - how can any short story of the year compare with "The Grove Of God").

OW is now my favorite magazine. I thought that Bill Hamling would top you with MADGE and TALES, but OW is on top. I have sort of a sentimental love for OW now, because I know that if OW flops, science-fiction will flop. I sure wish you could get out of your financial hole, tho. That way, OW could go monthly. And if OW went monthly - - ZOWIE!

Marty Fleischman
1247 Grant Avenue

Bronx 56, New York

P.S. Lenny Brown and I are starting a teen-age sf club in New York City. Interested people should call me at CY-3-0739 or Lenny Brown at In-7-1450.

Dear Sir:

Your editorial in the June issue rang a gong in my head. How well I know what you are talking about! I bought the top bracket car of a well known moderately priced make ($2,900) and have had trouble with the junker ever since! The tires blew off it before I had chalked 25,000 miles on it; the carburator builds up too much gas when I come to a quick stop and floods; the points burnt out with a condenser and the joker of a garage mechanic that worked on it, worked for 4 hours before he found the trouble. Keeps me broke making the monthly payments and keeping the thing in running order. I need a car in my line of work for I average 1,500 miles a month in pastoral calls as well as other line of duty calls. I could go on and on about faulty workmanship I find in other things - - chiefly household appliances. I could talk about the small electric heater we bought for the bathroom how it burns out a connection - - poorly soldered - - every time we turn it on.

I've started squawking already; your editorial lent a little more emphasis to my squawk.

I cut my eye-teeth on John Carter and the Mars stories. I surely wish the Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc. would release some of those classics into the pocketbook form so that we older fans could reread some of those wonderful stories.

I'm writing to them to appoint John Bloodstone to be legal successor to Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Rev. C. M. Moorhead
Box 171
Bettsville, Ohio.

To be entirely fair, we received one long letter championing today's products, and saying we were all wet. But every other letter we received, and there were dozens on this subject, said the same thing. One other phase of this is covered in the following letter .....Rap.

Dear RAP:

I've just read your editorial in Other Worlds.

In our business we get to see the results of thumb fingered mechanics' labors, from the drawing board to the service man.

Last week I delivered an invoice for the repair of a pair of aggregate and cement scales of the usual crude design, correcting misalignments that were the result of bad handling by the usual construction job roughneck, and coaching the boys in the proper setup, for which the key words plumb, square, and level are the principal "technical" reminders needed. So what happens? I get a rain of insulting remarks about being a robber and the like.

One thing though, these customers who have any comprehension of quality always come to us.

But it is a tough world for a craftsman these days, unless he be minded to tie himself to the machine tool industry or some industry making tools of destruction. Maybe it isn't too bad, though, for I do believe that the guy who sticks to integrity along the line will take over in due course of event.

Along that line, watch the cracks in our Luciferian Economy, as we go into fall and winter, widen as the breakup begins.

I sat in the restaurant having my coffee the other day, and a fellow whose name I didn't know, but who must have known me, asked me about some repairs on a clock that had been purchased by his father around the time he was born some 65 years ago. In that time the chime mechanism has worn in two spots, the timing pegs, so that the quarter hour chimes, while correct in timing the quarters, have an irregular, asymmetrical beat. I suggested he go to a watchmaker. Nuts, he said, there aren't any, they're all merchandisers, and can't do a job like that; you're the only one I know of to take it to. Outside of the ones I dismantled when I was a kid, I've never been inside a clock. Anyway, he's going to pick me up some day to look over the job of replacing the worn pegs, for the next 65 years timekeeping.

Find a mechanism made like that these days (save perhaps an Olson Scale).

E. C. H. Olson,
827 W. 25th St.
Scottsbluff, Nebr.

Dear Rap:

This is the first time I've ever written a "Letter to the Editor", but there comes a time . . .

First, let me explain—I thought OW was dead and buried long ago, and then, to This Island Paradise, This Garden of Eden, This Wonderful Coral Isle, This Place of Marvels and Never Ending Rain and Heat (I'm speaking of that inimitable Okinawa) comes a package from my sister, in which were two copies of the New OW.

I could hardly believe that such a thing could happen. What had Rap, that wonder man of ZD days, come to be, a ghoul? Anyway, suffice to say I opened the first copy (Feb. 56) with a sort of morbid chill running down my spine. I couldn't put it down 'til I'd finished the whole mag. I grabbed the second issue (April 56) and continued reading 'til it was finished and found I had been practically eaten alive by those charming little mosquitoes that buzz away all over the place. I'd been so engrossed that I hadn't heard or felt them at all.

Seriously, Rap, if you can bring back the kind of stories that made the old *Amazing* and *Fantastic* so great in the 30's and 40's, I'm all for you. I was just a sprout when I first ran into those two great old mags and I had a terrible time reading them because of very poor understanding and command of the English language. As it happened, I had a wonderful old friend who owned and ran a Used Book Store, and many of the hours I should have spent studying High School English, Grammar and Literature were happily spent browzing through musty, dirty shelves or sitting in a badly lighted corner reading back issues of those two really readable mags. If I could find a copy of "The Land of the Big Blue Apples" again, I think I could die happy.

. I'm enclosing a check for a sub to OW and I'd like, if it's at all possible, for you to start the sub with the June 56 issue so I won't miss any of those spell binding stories.

One thing more, Rap, I know I've missed a lot that most Americans (fans, that is) have never missed because of the difficult job of learning English I've had, but a good story doesn't have to be grammatically and mechanically correct to be interesting. Some of the most enticing and awe filling stories I've ever read have been grammatic suicides, but they still held me enthralled to the final word. As long as the story is good, I can't ask for more. After all, whose gift horse is it anyway?

Lots of luck Rap, and keep those swell yarns spinning.

Gilbert G. Lincoln
Okinawa Engineer Dist.
Air Force Area Office
APO 331
San Francisco, Calif.

Dear Ray:

I am writing to you personally to express my appreciation of your new efforts in bringing back science fiction to what it was and, I hope, can be again. I've been reading and enjoying that type of story for forty-five years, but had just about given up hope of anything like a renaissance happening to the field.

Not only has the type of story changed to where it's hardly recognizable as science fiction, but the length of stories has been getting shorter to the extent where the editor feels justified in calling 15,000 to 20,000 words a "BOOK LENGTH NOVEL." I don't know of anything more absurd, but you can see it almost every month. In my opinion, which is only one man's, of course, a story is still a short story until it contains at least 25,000 words. It may then be reasonably called a novelet, but I don't think it should be called a novel until it has at least 50,000 and preferably 75,000 words.

Anyway, in the November, 1955 issue of *Other Worlds* that I just received from you with your letter, one of the first things that I noticed and appreciated was that you called the lead story a 30,000 word *NOVELET*. Well, so much for that, but the misnaming of story lengths is a sore spot with me.

There is one request that I would like to make that will be, I think, negligible in cost, and that is that you put the number of words of the stories either in the Table of Contents or at the heading of each story. Also, I have been told all along that Other Worlds had folded up, but the way I read your letter you have been publishing all along. What about it? And where could I get the issues I have missed? Last one I have is for July, 1953.

Lewis D. Harrell,
2538 20th Place, W.,
Birmingham (8), Ala.

For a complete schedule of back issues of OW (and Universe, Science Stories, which were intervening titles) see list elsewhere in this issue. .....*Rap.*

WHY DON'T YOU PULL YOUR HAIR OUT BY THE ROOTS AND HAVE DONE WITH IT?

You might as well, if you're going to let dandruff and scale and skin rash make you bald as an egg. You've bought plenty of preparations and they don't work, you say? Of course they haven't! You've probably been cheated as many times as I have. I'll bet I've spent hundreds of dollars on tin-dandy goo and wound up with worse dandruff than I started with. Made me plenty mad, too. I always get mad when I think of the lousy junk designed to chisel your honest dollars out of you. Mad enough so that when I find something good, I'm not bashful about telling my friends about it. And OTHER WORLDS readers are my friends. I had dandruff all my life, and despaired of getting rid of it, until one day Ken Arnold (the flying saucer man) left a half bottle of Turn-er's at my home and flew off to Boise without it. I tried the stuff, because Ken's no sissy, and doesn't put perfume on his hair. Well, in one week my dandruff was gone! And my hair had begun to darken. My wife tried it, and her rash disappeared. You can bet we wrote Ken in a hurry and asked where he got it! And now, we're telling you. But don't just take our word for it—here are a few testimonials from our readers, to back us up.

As I have about used up one bottle of your hair preparation, please send me another. I have had very good results in ridding myself of dandruff and itching. Lionel O. Brandberg, Sharon Springs, Kans.

Enclosed find money order for $10.00 for two more bottles of Turn-er's as soon as possible. You sure found a good product. In the sixth application my dandruff was cured. Thanks to you. It does all you say and more, too. And it sure brings back the natural color to your hair. Thanks! R. E. Van Gordon, 1905 W. Milham Road, Kalamazoo, Mich.

Enclosed please find check for $5.00 for another bottle of Turn-er's as soon as possible. I have been bedeviled by a terrible itching in my eyebrows for over thirty years. It seemed to be a large flaky dandruff, but if I combed it out too near the skin, a watery substance would start, causing a scab-like condition. I have been to dozens of doctors . . . none did the slightest bit of good. After reading what Ray Palmer said, I decided to try Turn-er's. After the sixth application, I have not had an itch in my brows, and the skin underneath is as clear and clean as my face. I certainly am thankful to Mr. Palmer for bringing such a fine product to my attention.—S. W. Crusen, 2336 Fillmore Ave., Buffalo 14, N. Y.

Enough? Well, then take it from Ray Palmer, one bottle of

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CLEAN UP SCALP RASH

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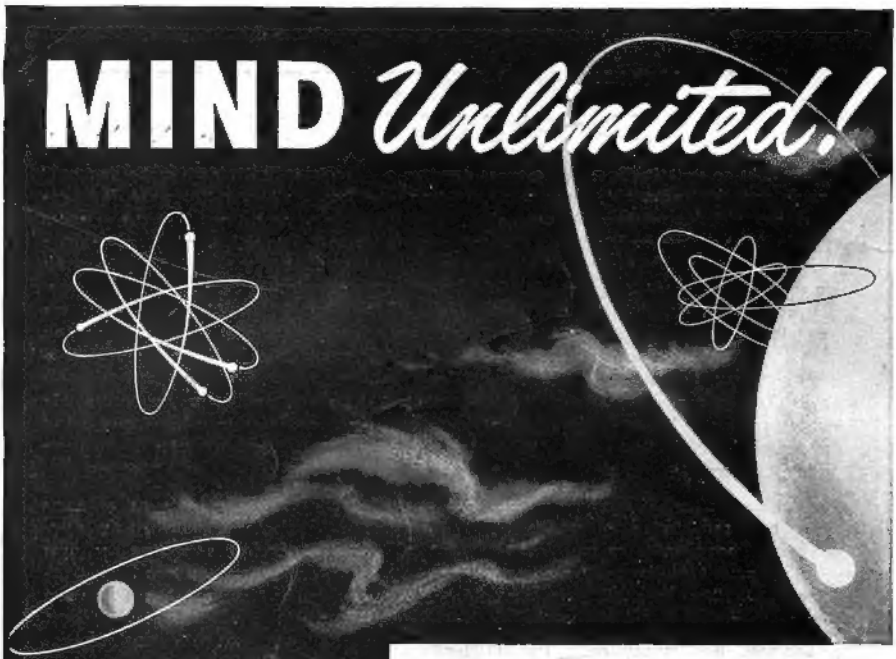

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